

# fifth estate

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**Demand the Impossible  
What's Next?**

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## SEXUALLY DIMORPHIC

My partner brought home a copy of *The Anarchist Review of Books* and I wanted so much to love it.

But why have someone who is apparently unfamiliar with current radical feminist thought review Silvia Federici's work? (See *Fifth Estate Anarchist Review of Books*, Winter 2021, "Revolution at Point Zero," by Ashlyn Monney.

I hate to tell Mooney this, but we are part of nature, we evolved as children of the Earth, and this emphasis has absolutely nothing to do with "abstract gender essence."

We are animals, we are sexually dimorphic, but I realize that religion has so poisoned our lives that people confuse biological facts with pathetic human ideas such as "gender essence."

I could even live with that silliness, but when I saw the word transphobic in another essay that was it. Transphobic is a word that is hurled at radical feminists who have no problem with men wearing makeup and high heels, who have never murdered someone who calls themselves transgender or transsexual, but who know the difference between men and women.

Transphobic is a word used by people who fully support the medical/industrial complex and Big Pharma, and who know absolutely nothing about the effects of cross-sex hormones on the human body, who know nothing about the surgeries inflicted on men and women, who know nothing about the mental illness associated with not being able to accept one's body as it is.

**Susan Elizabeth Siens**  
Unity, Maine

**Fifth Estate** note: An independent collective produced the Winter 2021 *Fifth Estate Anarchist Review of Books*.

# LETTERS

Send letters to [fe@fifthestate.org](mailto:fe@fifthestate.org) or Fifth Estate, POB 201016, Ferndale MI 48220

All formats accepted including typescript & handwritten.

Letters may be edited for length.

This is their reply to the above letter:

"We believe that sex, gender, and nature are all evolving cultural constructs even if they are tethered to some forms of biological reality."

## OUR FAILURES

I read the Fall 2020 issue and I'm amazed that an entire piece was devoted to discussing the CHAZ/CHOP and it didn't mention the multiple shootings. (See "Life in an Autonomous Zone: Seattle's Capitol Hill Organized Protest" by Rui Preti.

I supported the CHAZ (Capitol Hill Autonomous Zone) and was excited by it. But we have to recognize it was a disaster that got a kid killed. Anarchists need a little introspection about our failures.

It felt really insincere and dishonest to read that article just gloss over it.

**JR**  
Portland, Ore.

**Rui Preti replies:** My article is one among many contributing to reflections on the Capitol Hill Autonomous Zone/Capitol Hill Organized Protest (CHAZ/CHOP) in Seattle during June of last year. It touches on both the positive and negative aspects

as well as challenging some of the falsifications perpetrated by right-wing media and the local government.

However, in a short article it was only possible to briefly mention the problems related to decision-making, debates over tactics and emphasis, as well as coping with rightwing and other violence in the area. There are no easy answers to dealing with the kinds of violence that were present in and near the CHAZ/CHOP.

Various news stories state there was an increase in gun violence in Seattle in 2020 over 2019 even before the CHAZ/CHOP came into being, and the higher rate continued after the zone was ended. The causes for this seem to be multiple, including that the frustrations of Covid confinement added to the usual increase in violence in poor neighborhoods all too familiar during warm weather in U.S. cities.

The CHAZ/CHOP was not planned, but came into existence during the Black Lives Matter protests as the result of the unexpected withdrawal of the police from the area on June 8.

The people who came to make artwork, provide medical, food, clothing and other assistance as part of mutual aid, and make room for anti-racist discussions, also continued to be involved in marches and other protest activities all over the city.

It is true that Black Lives Matter and anarchist participants were not prepared to transform the dynamic of a troubled neighborhood, which is the byproduct of long-standing societal problems. It is also true that they understood that the CHAZ/CHOP was not isolated from the rest of the city and its problems.

Community residents, especially

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**T**his issue's theme, "What's Next? Demand the Impossible," is a challenge to all our imaginations.

We live in a world faced with the scourge of a plague, and in a country that is an armed madhouse with a good portion of its population seemingly gone off the rails with fascist rage and white fear.

What appears in these pages is nothing like a blueprint for where or how to focus our energies. We know well what we don't want and what doesn't work. In general, we know that creating alternative communities of resistance is what brings results and can provide a model of the world we desire.

The stories of the Paris Commune (p. 42) and the Spanish Revolution (p. 24) relate the heroic efforts of what was achieved by those whose vision we share, but ones that were repressed in blood. We take inspiration from them, but also learn.

This issue follows our Winter 2021 edition. You did not miss an issue in between. Thank you to everyone who participated in the writing, editing, and production, and to our readers, subscribers, and Sustainers.

New subscribers and subscription renewals are at an all-time high, reflecting the times in which we live, and the engagement with the ideas that animate the anarchist movement.

**Fifth Estate**

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## Unfuck the World

**U**nfuck the World, says the sign on this page and the next. It isn't just a one-off, rude slogan held by someone justifiably angry at the state of things.

It stems from the 2017 rap/rock song of that name by The Prophets of Rage, a band comprised of members of Rage Against the Machine, Public Enemy, and Cypress Hill. It's an anthem for what has become a worldwide movement that will host its 9<sup>th</sup> annual UTW Day, September 18.

The movement's goal are very general, but are clearly against racism, war, climate change,

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German forest defenders at play. See p. 5.  
—photo: Philippe Pernot



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## Yes, but we want more than that!

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and other features of modern society that are, indeed, fucked up. Their online statement emphasizes local actions around community-determined goals, ones that include steps to address social and ecological ills with “positive actions.”

People acting outside of approved channels. DIYing to meet community needs. Protecting the environment, animals, and homeless. Strongly opposing all forms of discrimination and racism. All of this is admirable.

**H**owever, it's a far cry from what animated rebels from 1848 to 1939 during an almost century of revolutionary agitation and action, all framed by a vision of a new world that completely shed the horrors of what continues today. Anarchist, as well as communists, and socialists, envisioned a utopia, in which exploitation based on class rule enforced by the armed might of the state was ended.

Almost all of this was based on the idea that a radicalized working class would be the mechanism to overthrow the current system and install a cooperative and free society to replace the misery of capitalist society. When revolts began in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century with the Luddite resistance to factory work and the European revolutions of 1848, capitalism was in its beginning stages although state repressive machinery had thousands of years of practice in blunting popular rebellions. Ultimately, the more organized forces of the state

won every battle.

The final notable effort for traditional revolution was broken in Spain by a fascist victory aided by Stalinist treachery and the onset of World War II. Following that global conflict, many events labeled themselves revolutions, but all either solely changed who gave the orders to the police, leaving traditional capitalism in place, or worse, established state capitalist police regimes calling themselves communist or socialist.

**S**ince then, very few upsurges have challenged the entire apparatus of the work/war nation state. It's the triumph of capital in all corners of the globe to the point where those who continue to speak in the voice of the prior revolutionary period are thought to be at best unrealistic. Some Marxists continue to employ the phrase late capitalism, sort of a political version of whistling by the graveyard to tell themselves that the master's voice was not erroneous. Revolution is always at hand. However, it's hard to tell at any given moment at what inflection point on an historical arc we are located.

Are we at a late stage? Instead, perhaps, at the entry to a period such as chronicled in Jack London's 1908 *The Iron Heel* where the Oligarchy reigns for centuries. Or, worse. In another dystopian novel, *1984*, where O'Brien of the Thought Police tells Winston Smith, Orwell's hapless protagonist, that if he wants “a picture of the future, imagine a



boot stamping on a human face—forever.”

So, what's next if that's a possibility. Or, a reality? How do we live our lives? How do we resist the boot and the Oligarchy? One response is to work cooperatively to unfuck the world. Even the conviviality of a community garden, free stores, or neighborhood health clinics. Most certainly express our outrage at the brutality of a murderous system that defines itself with lies and platitudes.

But, let's not lose sight of a larger desire for an entirely different new world. The less we pronounce our vision, the farther away its reality will recede. The quieter we become about speaking out for the visions that animated our

comrades of the past and us, the more the tyranny of the fact, of state and capitalist society, assures itself of a thousand-year Reich.

We often publish histories of people who participated in thrusts against the system. The Spanish Revolution of the late 1930s stands out to show that the new world carried in their hearts by workers and peasants could be made real. Their defeat is heartbreaking, but still exemplary.

Whether this is early or late capitalism, we will define ourselves as humans against the machine by raging against it, yes, but also by our acts and our choices each day that reflect the world we want.

—photo: Philippe Pernot

## Unfuck the climate: Occupy the forests!



Forest defender near Frankfurt, Germany relax at their climate camp where they built tree houses, huge tripods, and a complex of zip lines to stop the destruction of a forest to build a highway.

## Direct Action Creates Community

PHILIPPE PERNOT

**A**narchist utopias are alive and well, not only in Chiapas or Rojava but also in the heart of capitalist Europe. In Germany, police repression and gentrification have dealt a decisive blow to traditional anarchist strongholds like Berlin, with numerous free spaces closed down since the pandemic started.

But a new form of protest is blossoming. Eco-anarchists are building momentum all over Germany. The black and green flag is stronger than ever and enjoys surprisingly widespread sympathy among the public.

The Dannenröder Forest, nicknamed “Danni,” fifty miles from Frankfurt, is suffering. A highway is being built, cutting through the forest like an open wound. It is a battlefield, a witness to environmental destruction and to resistance. Hundreds of activists occupied the route of the planned A49 highway from October 2019 to December 2020.

They were inspired by protests in the Hambacher Forst, known as “Ham-

bi,” Germany's most mediatized land occupation with a clear and organic growth from one protest to the other. Out of protesters' imagination sprang a hundred tree houses, numerous massive wooden tripods and a dense constellation of zip lines, creating a unique ecosystem of resistance.

Organized in neighborhoods, life there was utopic. All decisions were made in a decentralized, unanimous manner, leaving space for activists to live without constraints or hierarchies. Anarcho-feminist, antiracist, and anti-capitalist slogans celebrating life in the forest echoed around the campfires.

But repression was on the way. Last December, nearly 3,000 police with water cannons, led by special commandos, invaded the forest. After destroying all barricades and tree houses, they cleared the way for the deforestation.

Cutting through the dense forest, the future road is heavily protected by barbed wire and massive police patrols. Yet the eco-anarchist resistance has not demobilized. Hundreds of activists reunited in April 2021 for a climate camp to reinvent the protest. They now legally occupy village structures and intend to build a resilient movement based on decentralized direct action.

Forest occupations (*Waldbesetzungen*) have seven lives. Somehow, being expelled by the police strengthens them. Activists disperse around the country, share their experiences and know-how and create new areas of protest.

An organic network of resistance is

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# The Path to Change: Community

STEVE WELZER

**T**he movement for social change must be comprehensive and multi-dimensional. There is no simple Solution and no single Best Way to get from here to there.

But there has recently been a shift of sentiment regarding where and how our efforts for social change are most likely to be rewarded. Individuals and families, increasingly atomized within mass society, lack the resources and leverage to have that much of an impact. At the other end of the spectrum, the dominate institutions (corporations, government agencies, large universities, non-profits, etc.) possess institutional inertia to a degree that frustratingly impedes change.

The milieu most conducive to transformative activity may be that intermediate level of human association we refer to as community.

## TWO DIFFERENT WAYS OF HUMAN LIFE

Until relatively recently, from the perspective of natural history, the vast majority of humans lived within a communitarian social context—tribes or villages or small towns—characterized by familiarity with/interdependence among

neighbors, and identity with a particular place-on-earth. Social and territorial domains-of-life were local, bounded, human-scale, and manageable. Under those circumstances accountability and responsibility mostly was immediate, and direct. Poet Gary Snyder refers to this as the Old Ways.

About ten thousand years ago, for reasons debated by historians and anthropologists (though there is consensus that increasing dependence upon a more-intensive form of agriculture was a factor), a radical alteration of lifeways took hold in selected areas of the human diaspora. Aggressive cultures driven to development and expansionism suddenly confronted autonomous tribes and villages as an external, destabilizing force. The indigens tried to resist both the aggressors and the pressure to transform their own ways of living, but the aboriginal communities were almost always, eventually, overwhelmed by the empire builders.

With the spread of this phenomenon, Neolithic culture in general trended toward New Ways—toward a labor-intensive organization of life preoccupied with acquisition and productivity. The rise of the state, patriarchy, and the concept of private property followed in its wake. The seeds of the modern Leviathan can be traced to this momentous transition from one way of life to another.

## WITHERING OF COMMUNITY WITHIN THE LEVIATHAN

During the millennia since the Neolithic Revolution, social resources have increasingly been allocated away from local communities toward urban-centric institutions and



state-sponsored development/commerce/militarism.

Philosopher of technology, Lewis Mumford, wrote about how, since antiquity, commercial interests and the state have constituted an interlocking juggernaut ever-promoting the ideology of progress and technological development. We've now arrived at a point where life has become almost totally dominated by the hypertrophied institutions and technologies of mass industrial society.

The mega-states and multinational corporations have become remote, self-aggrandizing power centers. In what are called free market democracies, people are reduced to participating by casting votes for representatives or buying shares of stock, but effective control is wielded by elites who are the beneficiaries of unprecedented concentrations of wealth and power.

Under these circumstances, community has withered. Personal life has become atomized and hyper-individualistic. Families reside in consumption-oriented bedroom communities characterized by high rates of mobility. Material standards of living ratchet up along with competitive pressures. Social capital dwindles while stress on people and the planet increases.

It is imperative to recognize the stark alternatives we are now confronting. One path continues the unsustainable, unsatisfying status quo. Another leads in the direction of reclaiming equilibrium, balance, and social sanity. The latter means scaling down and slowing down, learning to live more lightly. Individuals and families can do their part, but such a major transformation of lifeways requires the aggregated power of social movements and collective efforts.

#### WE NEED TO MAKE CHANGE TOGETHER

A key aspect of the movement for a new society will be fostering the emergence of intentional communities committed to taking an integrated approach to addressing the problems of ecological degradation and social dysfunction.

People need to make change together, ideally at a scale where they feel empowered and consequential. We all could benefit from having the inspiration and appreciation of valued Others who are simultaneously colleagues, comrades, and neighbors.

We need to have the pleasure of company and co-participation, the motivation of peer appraisal (and praise!), the sense that we are engaged in significant common enterprise and shared goal-achievement. It is in community, through joint action, that we have the best chance to improve our quality of life while making significant strides in the direction of sustainability.

The eco-communitarian solution to the modern crisis points is locally-oriented, human-scale lifeways characterized by familiarity, stability, interdependence, and relation-to-place.



Psychological/characterological health is dependent upon having a place and a status within a comprehensible social world. Disorientation results from trying to negotiate within domains that effectively lack boundaries and from trying to succeed while confronting standards associated with steeply pyramidal status hierarchies.

We're given the impression that we are fortunate to be presented with near-limitless sources of stimulation, choice, and opportunity. But psychologists are discovering that such an operational milieu is confusing, distracting and anxiety-provoking. In our globalized mass-production/mass-consumption/mass-communication reality, human scale long ago ceased to be a value.

All has gone hyper. Too much, too fast, too far, too big. Too synthetic and overly complex. Ours is now a civilization of disorientation and discontent.

The lesson to be learned is that social pathology invariably results when a society becomes unmoored from a basic grounding in sensibilities of limits and balances. Avoiding a collision course with madness requires more than technological panaceas, corporate constraints, or governmental regime change. We need to restore the human scale in all aspects of life. We need to reconstitute real community.

The eco-communitarian solution to the modern crisis points is locally-oriented, humanly-scaled lifeways characterized by familiarity, stability, interdependence, and relation-to-place. Such is the basis for respect, love, and care for each other and for the earth.

Cohousing and ecovillage communities can serve as models and base camps for the broad global movement working to green our civilization and set it on a path toward sustainability.

We need to find our way Home.

Steve Welzer has been a Green movement activist for over thirty years. He edits *Green Horizon Magazine* and is an organizer with the Altair Ecovillage project in Kimberton, Penn. Steve wrote the Introduction to David Watson's *Beyond Bookchin: Preface for a Future Social Ecology*. He lives in East Windsor, N.J.



# Music and Domestication

Hope lies with those musicians who resist

**BEN OLSON**

**W**e need to affirm the value of music, especially undomesticated music, particularly during the social deprivations of the current pandemic. The past year has been a blur of social isolation, sheltering-in-place, and lockdowns.

The muted horrors of 2020 and beyond have led to increasingly isolated pleasures, fearful desires, little moments of secret forgetting (or seeking forgetting), private escapes that often only exacerbate the effects of being alone and afraid. In this situation, for many people, the experience of media, watching movies, reading, or listening to music, becomes a coveted refuge, a vain attempt at relaxation and respite from constant, only half-acknowledged anxiety, a survivors' kit for augmenting the effects of collectively (though unevenly) distributed, and privately suffered, cultural trauma. But the isolation of music, the intertwining of the musical experience with our increasing domestication, means that our attempts to heal may fall short.

What we need is to let the air in, not seal off our pain in airtight moments of longing. It's important, then, to affirm the value of undomesticated music—wild in its composition and/or in its listening format—for the purpose of opening ourselves up at a time when we run the risk of closing off completely.

**A**vant-garde and improvisational music, such as that of English avant-rock guitarists Fred Frith and Derek Bailey, or the experimental surrealistic art collective, The Residents, stretch the boundaries of what counts as musical by exploring the potential of atonality and noise.

People experience music in highly personal ways, shaped by their individual pasts and presents, beyond and above what can be expressed with language. It doesn't need to be discursive, nor must it necessarily include any kind of regularity beyond the inevitably imperfect rhythms of a living body, such as a heartbeat. Undomesticated melody has the potential to resist dominant modes of communicating, by creating a temporary, imaginary world that allows one to express oneself against what dominates, against the forces of control which seek to define the limits of what is possible.

In our society, these forces are embodied and rooted in colonial ideologies implemented most immediately by police. They normalize the capture, imprisonment and even murder of subjugated people.

Music is an effective tool for showing solidarity with those who seek to resist such control. When cities were under lockdown against the COVID-19 pandemic as well as curfews meant to curtail the protests against police brutality, many musicians resisted the restraint put on them by joining anti-racist protesters to show their support and lend their music as a means of expression. On the internet, within the surveilled screens of social media, angered musicians posted videos of



The Residents are an American art collective doing avant-garde music and multimedia works. Since their first official release, "Meet the Residents" in 1974, they have released over 60 albums, numerous music videos and short films, three CD-ROM projects, and ten DVDs.

wild new songs and performances that sought to transform their world from the horrors they were witnessing. As an irrational howl against restraint, the undomesticated melody demands the impossible, a life without a master, with no authority but oneself.

Domestication is the instilling of submission into individuals or groups through physical/biological means (such as plant and animal breeding and other agricultural practices), or through ideological or broader cultural practices, such as religion and other practices that constitute truth for a society. The construction of cultural norms and the locking out of what does not submit to them can be applied to different kinds of cultural activity. But domestication occurs at the level of experience first.

The domesticator compels potential subordinates to experience themselves as docile beings, already submissive. Unruly behaviors—actions that run against this training—are



said to go against their very nature. To be domesticated is to have one's experience broken into instinct and obedience. The goal of domestication is to convince the trainee that docility is instinctual.

Among critiques of civilization, domestication is usually understood as an ecological term related to agriculture. Implied in that understanding, however, is a broader conception of domestication as resignation to a dominant culture, housebreaking the human mind.

This approach is useful in understanding the limitations of the work of the musician, but does not exclude or contradict a more pointed primitivist critique which could be made simply by linking the digitization of music to the technologizing of everyday life, or, on a more anthropological level, by observing the historical links between harmony and hierarchy. Complimentary to this critique is an existential description of the experience of domestication in music.

Music and the work of the musician have undergone new stages of domestication by way of a withdrawal of the musical experience from a shared lifeworld into two immaterial realms: the internet and the exclusively mental. This constitutes a taming of the experience and work of melodic performance. Content-wise, too, songs have become ever more reliant on snap-to-grid timing to be cut-and-pasted and easily manipulated in computer software.

This affects not only the work of musicians, but the deeper rhythmic layers of the human being. While this technique makes it easier to create songs, it also makes music easier to predict, blunting the effect of anticipation, and locking out anxiety from the listener's experience, instead of allowing that anxiety to play out and resolve itself.

**M**usic is not just a cultural activity, but an expression of the rhythms of being itself. As we restrain ourselves or allow ourselves to be restrained by submitting to dominant modes of expression in exchange for participation in culture, we lose access to these more basic rhythms of being, which need not have any necessary relationship to the culture whose participation demands such a trade-off.

By replacing the free irregularities of improvised performances that follow no steady internal time signature, with techniques that more easily conform to a synchronized rhythm, we give up an essential element of the musical process for something more compatible with cultural assumptions about a broader conception of music. This constrains the idiosyncratic rhythms of being that are integral to the freer experience of undomesticated timing. The pulsing, metronomic syncopations are brought inside us, between the ears, in a last-ditch effort to replace the lost lucidity of our more instinctual, bodily rhythms.

This headphone experience, while often thrilling, frequently both visceral and cerebral in the same note, is a powerful substitution for the lived, spatial experience of the

body in a shared world, but a substitution nonetheless. It brings the rhythms inside, rather than enticing the listener to inhabit a rhythmic world. It makes the body into a world of its own, which is especially dangerous in a time when emotional injuries are incubating, growing and feeding off social deprivations, fueling what could become deep interpersonal inhibitions which may burden future generations. We must ensure that we and our descendants are not left unable to truly inhabit the world, unable to face reality in its unpredictability, to not only tolerate but inhabit and participate in the wild clutter of reality.

For various reasons, music may not be played out loud, instead pumped into either side of the listener's skull, as if it were their own private experience. This can make listening to music more exciting in some ways. Things like track panning, fading in/out, and various audio effects work to make the experience of recorded songs more interesting, as the production plays with positionality in the body. But the withdrawal of the listener from an open space wherein the performer shares spatial perceptual access to the music, or where people listen together, is a repressing of the dynamic and independent life of the song itself, in all its rhythmic finitude. It's a closing of the boundaries around the musical instinct, where the deprivation is of the human body in its open space and access to other bodies.

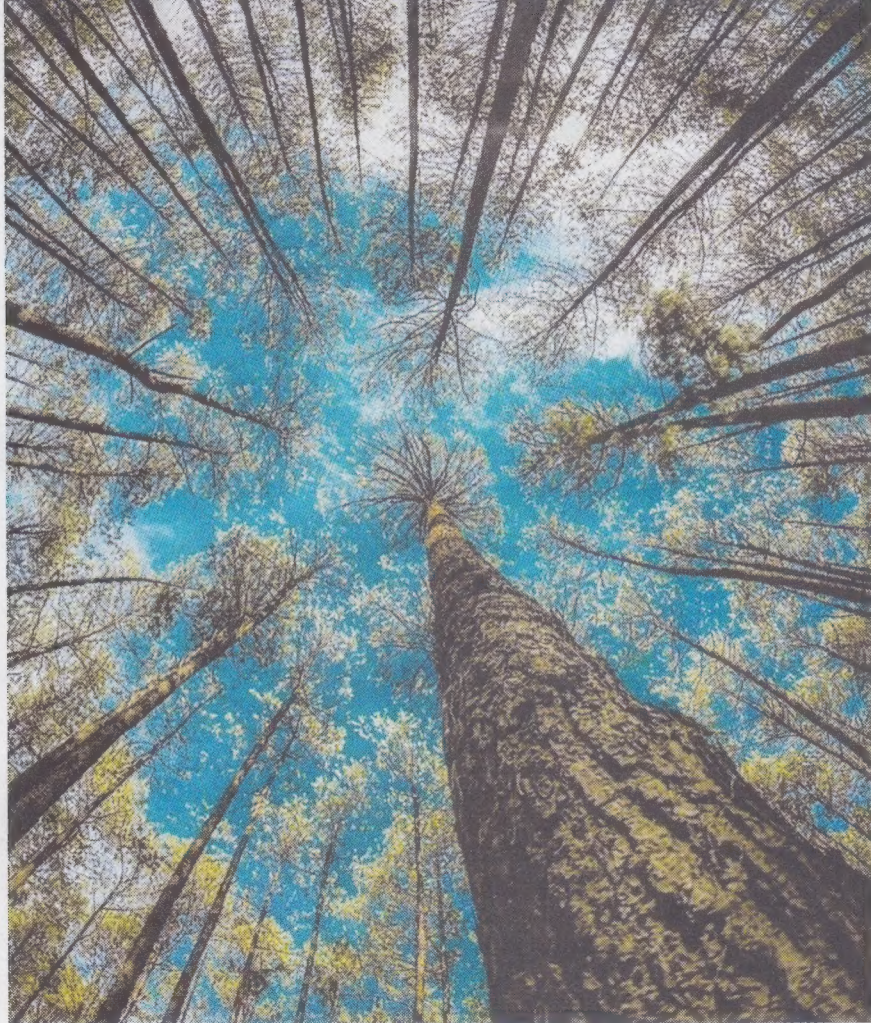
**T**he other immaterial realm where music can be experienced is the internet, which can, arguably, be a place of shared unconscious. On the internet, consciousnesses regularly confront each other as though inhabiting the same open, mental space. Music can even be made together in this digital realm, between individuals in otherwise geographically separated locations. But the blunt materiality of the outside, the being-there, the inhabiting of a fully perceptual, spatial world, is lacking online.

Perception is synesthetic. Hearing, like other senses, is not separable from its wider perceptual context. Experience of the world is not reducible to separable, divided senses, but relies on an open context in which the senses comeingle. The multi-sensed world is the context of music, and without it, music lives a rigid life.

Hope lies with those musicians who are attempting to break out of the withdrawal, resist the illusory collectivity of the internet, and break the monotonous regularity of machine rhythms by embracing the unpredictability and irregularity of tempo, experiencing the lucidity of being by playing outside of time signatures, or ditching them altogether, and reclaiming the rebellious and unruly in melody, and welcoming the life of music which exists on the outside.

Ben Olson is a writer and musician based in New York City. He is studying philosophy at The New School for Social Research.





# To Live as the Trees Do

NOAH JOHNSON

**I**n Peter Kropotkin's 1902 *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution*, countless examples are provided of cooperation among animals, countering the social Darwinist concept of ruthless competition as the framework for both nature and human society.

Yet a frustrating exception to the seemingly ubiquitous importance of mutual aid was the apparent hyper-individualism of plants. Kropotkin dismissed this as due to their immobility, thus making competition a requirement for their survival. It is true that plants seem quite solitary, each concerned exclusively for its own survival.

For much of agriculture as well, monoculture is seen as the most efficient method of producing food and materials. In forestry, for instance, endless acres of a single lumber species are planted in flawless rows, emulating the homogenous tilled fields of industrial agriculture, though on a larger scale. At first glance, this method seems quite reasonable.

After all, the goal of agriculture is to maximize production of the desired crop. Therefore, monocultures represent an avoidance of competition by removing undesired species that are assumed to interfere with the growth of the desired

crop. Similarly, a superficial glance at a forest likely yields an image of numerous struggling species, resulting in the monocultures of commercial forestry intended to remove competition and aid the growth of the target species.

In recent years, however, the concept of the solitary tree has been shown to be largely a myth. A diverse, natural forest, that is the antithesis of modern monoculture, is a massive network of mutual aid, both between trees of the same species and even across species. They make up a colossal system of communication and protection as strong as the mutual aid systems used by animals described by Kropotkin.

Trees, like animals, find more success through cooperation than competition, and this cooperation can take on many forms from the sharing of nutrients to protection from predators. Enabled by a system of fungi connecting the root systems of plants (mycorrhizal fungi), trees can perform a sort of communication for the purpose of mutual aid.

Perhaps the clearest example of this is in nutrient transfer via fungi-facilitated root connections. The researcher to first discover these connections, Susanne Simard, said in a *Yale Environment 360* interview that the fungal network "connects one tree root system to another tree root system, so that nutrients and carbon and water can exchange between the trees." When asked if trees know which members of the system require the most aid, Simard confirmed, mentioning that she noted during research that a shaded Douglas fir received more carbon from a neighboring birch, while in the fall, when the birch had lost its leaves, it in turn received carbon from the evergreen fir.

Similarly, forester and author of *The Hidden Life of Trees*, Peter Wohlleben, discovered an ancient beech stump, kept alive by neighboring beeches despite seemingly offering nothing to them in return, demonstrating that nutrient transfer can exist across species or within a species and targets the tree with the greatest need. In fact, it was even found



that struggling Douglas Fir transfer nutrients to younger Ponderosa Pine, benefiting the health of the forest as a whole as opposed to only themselves.

In addition to the important function of nutrient transfer, trees are also able to communicate information via the mycorrhizal network and other methods. For instance, acacia trees were found to release a scent warning nearby trees of feeding giraffes which then produced a toxin to ward off the herbivores.

Some species of trees synchronize their production of seeds, thus creating such an abundance that foraging animals are unable to consume them all, and some seeds are allowed to grow. And, mycorrhizal fungi aid in a so called "wood-wide web" in which trees warn each other of environmental dangers such as drought or pests.

So then, what is the significance of trees being cooperative rather than solitary beings? For one, trees provide yet another example of mutual aid in nature, contributing to the already significant pool of examples showing nature as web of cooperation. The forest ecosystem arguably provides one of the largest and most convincing examples of mutual aid in the natural world.

For millennia, humans of numerous cultures have been awed by the sublimity and apparent sentience of the forest as a single living being. Even today, the endless commodification of forests has not permeated society so deeply as to uproot the sense of wonder that comes with standing in an old growth forest.

Additionally, mutual aid benefits the forests themselves, lending an extra layer of adaptability so crucial in withstanding modern environmental disasters. However, while providing a convincing example of the salience of mutual aid as well as directly benefiting the forest ecosystem itself are both significant consequences of mutual aid in trees, perhaps the most consequential factor is its implications for human societies.

When examining the characteristics of mutual aid among trees, there are a few notable elements. First, it is a network of cooperation and not simply one-time transfers of nutrients.

Healthy trees will supply struggling trees with nutrients and will receive nutrients in turn should they begin to struggle. Second, the mutual aid network is not hierarchical. There is no single tree directing the flow of nutrients, no tree dictating who shall receive aid and who shall go without it, but rather a constant web of individuals contributing to members of the network in need and accepting aid themselves when needed.

Finally, the forest mutual aid network is not homogenous. While oaks may help oaks and beeches may help beeches, mutual aid functions across species as well, with Douglas fir aiding birch and even mycorrhizal fungi working in partner-

ship with individual trees. Thus, mutual aid among trees is cooperative, non-hierarchical, and heterogeneous.

Mutual aid has always been a component of human societies just as it is a component of nature. Some may see the above connections as overly anthropomorphizing and they likely are to an extent.

However, despite considerable differences between humans and trees, humans are ultimately a part of nature and frequently participate in mutual aid, despite even the relentless avarice of capitalism. Like mutual aid among trees, mutual aid among people has been and must be based upon cooperation, not charity, equality, not hierarchy, and inclusion, not selective or nationalistic aid.

As humans—individual beings with passions, hopes, and identities—we should not live the capitalist dream of materialism and self-interest. We should not hate the Other or neglect our creative and spiritual well-being in an endless chase for that extra dollar, but rather, live by compassion and mutual aid.

We should be the roots entering the smallest crack and fracturing the sturdiest foundation, linking together like a vast mycorrhizal web until the forest breaks through the pavement.

In essence, we should live as the trees do.

Noah Johnson is a student at the University of Nebraska studying German and Environmental Studies. He enjoys hiking in the woods, taking photos, and generally spending time in nature.

## Call for Submissions for the Fall 2021

### Fifth Estate

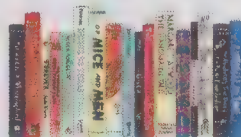
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ALL POWER TO THE IMAGINATION!





# Revolutionary Ecology 40 years of the Earth First! Journal

KAREN PICKETT

**T**he direct action-oriented Earth First! radical environmental movement and its public-facing arm, the *Earth First! Journal*, turned 40 years old in 2020. And, 2020 almost killed the venerable *Journal*.

The scrappy and irreverent publication was plunged into pandemic and quarantine hell, as its volunteers and tiny staff

azine, the online “Earth First! Newswire,” and twice-yearly national gatherings, there is no central infrastructure. Rather, what constitutes Earth First! activity is campaign participation rooted in the underlying tenants of direct action, biocentrism and a declaration of “no compromise in the defense of Mother Earth.”

There is no doubt that Earth First! has stumbled over itself many times in its four-decade history, but it has been a forward-moving evolution for the most part, culturally and strategically. From its birth in a time when the environmental movement was as white as the driven snow, largely male, and rather insular, Earth First! has been risk-taking and bold, irreverent and self-effacing, and deeply committed to stopping the profit-motivated forces ripping apart the biological fabric of the earth.

Earth First!, and the *Journal* has stood with other species to the point of accusations of misanthropy, which are not totally unfounded. There were infamous heated debates with anarchist theorist Murray Bookchin’s crowd in the 1980s and 90s around his concept of social ecology vs. EF!’s deep ecology.

Criticism by some of individual actions that were labeled macho such as climbing to the tops of trees to protect them, and chaining oneself to heavy equipment. However, the larger activist community mainstreamed those tactics in subsequent decades.

Now, direct action, and environmental sabotage known by EF!ers as monkey wrenching, are employed in countless environmental campaigns, by many organizations. Even the stodgy Sierra Club engages in civil disobedience.

**B**ut where we have come, is to a framework for our organizing that’s being labeled Revolutionary Ecology. As the late and iconic activist Judi Bari, who was seriously injured by a bomb placed in her car in 1990 in retaliation for her Earth First! organizing put it: “Starting from the very reasonable, but unfortunately revolutionary concept that social practices which threaten the continuation of life on Earth must be changed, we need a theory of revolutionary ecology that will encompass social and biological

issues, class struggle, and a recognition of the role of global corporate capitalism in the oppression of peoples and the destruction of nature. Biocentrism is a law of nature, that exists independently of whether humans recognize it or not.”

The theory is deep ecology, and it is the core belief of this radical environmental movement. Deep ecology, or biocentrism, is the belief that nature does not exist to serve humans. All species have an inherent right to exist for their own sake, regardless of their usefulness to humans. And,



An Earth First! direct action blockade to defend a forest

at its office in southern Oregon, used to working collectively in person, passing around articles being edited, was suddenly in chaos, navigating through poor internet in rural Oregon and steering over other considerable bumps in the road.

It is impossible to talk about the Earth First! movement without talking about the *Earth First! Journal* in the same breath. One of the unique aspects of the organization is that it is not really an organization at all, in that its infrastructure is minimal and horizontal by design. Aside from the mag-



biodiversity is a value in itself, essential for the flourishing of all life—both human and non-human. A revolutionary ecology movement must also organize among poor and working people.

Biocentrism is ancient indigenous wisdom. But another unique aspect of Earth First! is that biocentrism, rather than anthropocentrism, is the underpinning of its campaign strategies.

As we claw our way out of the pandemic and politically toxic year of 2020, a handful – or fistful – of us are working to get back on a publication schedule for the *Journal* and the online Earth First! Newswire. People working on it are fiercely committed because there is not another place to go, to find a group organizing compromise-averse direct action, the strategy filtered through a biocentric lens. If the *Earth First! Journal* disappears from the landscape, the same campaigns would be there; the people would be there; along with the tactics and strategies. But it is a movement, a commonality of purpose and philosophy and cherished values that binds together a bunch of affinity groups wearing Earth First! t-shirts.

Given the absence of a formal infrastructure, it is not clear how the Earth First! movement, as resilient as it is,

would survive the loss of its networking tool, its infra-organizational communication tool, its public face.

I hope readers of the Fifth Estate will check out the *Journal*. EF! merchandise is online, so you can adorn your torso with an Earth First! shirt, or other spunky trinkets. What is most needed is subscribers.

Subscribe now in time to receive the pulled-out-of-the-ashes 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary special issue that will relaunch our publication schedule. It will put radical history and a radical future in your hands and help Earth First! re-emerge on the scene renewed, bold, and ready to defend the earth with everything we've got.

The *Journal* can be reached at Earth First! Journal, P.O. Box 411892, Kansas City, MO 64141, and online for subscriptions, merchandise, information, and donations at [earthfirstjournal.news](http://earthfirstjournal.news).

Karen Pickett has been a grassroots activist for over four decades, organizing on ecological, civil liberties and social justice campaigns, engaging in direct action strategies, alliance building, and skills training, and community resilience. She is also a writer and editor, and working on a book about the radical environmental movement.



ERIC LAURSEN

**C**ritical theory is a bit like pornography, as a Supreme Court justice once said when asked to define the latter: "I know it when I see it."

Critical theory can be defined pretty loosely as well. It's the multitude of intellectual spin-offs from Marx that began to take flight roughly a hundred years ago, at about the time that Lenin and his acolytes thought they have codified what

## How Critical Theory Can Help Anarchists See Clearly

Orthodox Marxism was, forever.

Starting with Rosa Luxemburg, Antonio Gramsci, and the thinkers who made up the Frankfurt School in pre-Nazi Germany, the loosely-described tradition of critical theorists have tried to figure out what comes next when history stops behaving the way it was supposed to in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

New categories of struggle vie for attention, the State becomes ever more violent and dominating, and capitalism keeps on adapting. Along the way, many critical theorists have strayed far from what Marx had in mind, although they still insist on quarrying the master's work for indications that he was moving in the same direction.

Stubbornly, they also resist admitting that the road they've taken was already paved for them and already has a name: anarchism. You can find any number of thinkers in the Marxist tradition citing texts by Hakim Bey, the Invisible Committee, Todd May, and others, and invoking concepts like autonomy and leaderlessness, without acknowledging that they belong to a distinct anarchist tradition and instead using them as a grab-bag from which they can pick and choose to bolster their own theoretical case.

That doesn't mean anarchists should ignore critical theory. These writers are grappling with many of the same social and political problems, and they've informed anar-





chist thinking as much as anarchists have affected theirs. Theorists like Benjamin, Marcuse, Deleuze, Foucault, Hardt and Negri, and Said have influenced anarchist thinking on power, counterrevolution, and cultural domination, just as anarchists have pushed them more in the direction of decentralization, autonomy, and leaderlessness.

Anarchists have also made a somewhat parallel journey from their points of origin. Like Marx, classical 19<sup>th</sup> century anarchists were imbued with faith in science and convinced that society was moving toward an ideal condition of freedom that it would certainly reach if only the world read or heard its most cogent spokespeople, and acted accordingly.

Now, we're not so sure. Is any ideal condition conceivable? Isn't human history a continuing process of struggle and change, and shouldn't our political thinking evolve with it? Don't the earth and its non-human inhabitants have their own history that follows its own path?

**C**ritical theory began with a desire to answer some of these questions, which Marx didn't do in any easily discernible way. These theorists wanted not just to understand and explain society, but to figure out how to change it. What keeps people from doing the logical thing and overthrowing capitalism and the State? How can we push back against the power of cultural straitjackets like religion, ideology, racism and gender oppression?

"The political condition is an endless struggle that does not terminate in a perfect situation or a utopian state," writes Bernard E. Harcourt in a recent book updating critical theory, *Critique & Praxis: A Critical Philosophy of Illusions, Values, and Action*, "but goes on forever so that in the end, the political struggle has to be itself part of the utopian vision and of what critical theory embraces."

Recognizing this is just as essential to keeping anarchism practical and relevant because it keeps us focused on understanding and addressing the current condition of society, instead of reaching some utopian endpoint that may no longer make sense by the time we get there. Context, in other words, is everything. It's important to remember that anarchism is supposed to facilitate a larger struggle that keeps

*Critical theory examines violence in popular culture:*  
"Insofar as cartoons do any more than accustom the senses to the new tempo, they hammer into every brain the old lesson that continuous friction, the breaking down of all individual resistance, is the condition of life in this society." Adorno, et al.

shifting as political and economic conditions change. And we have to make sure we don't adopt strategies that replicate the patterns of power we're trying to overcome.

Critical theorists today address the same concerns. It is necessary to move away from the old categories of revolution and instead focus our energies on insurrectional practices: uprisings, revolts, insurgencies, resistances, insubordinations, desertions. The difference is that revolutions—even the most successful, like those that liberated the colonized world after World War II—generally seek to replace one regime or one version of the State with another.

**W**e don't take down capitalism and the State by storming the Capitol and installing ourselves there—the right is perfectly good at that, too—but by attacking them in a thousand places and in a thousand different ways. In other words, by creating a social revolution through our activism, as the Zapatistas, the farmers in India's Punjab, and the Movement for Black Lives are all doing. Once we do this, it won't be so hard to topple what's left of the State.

Critical theorists have always emphasized another valuable principle: to avoid the pitfall of truth-seeking. Claims of truth are always contingent, in part because the quest for truth is always soaked in the relationships of power that course through a society defined by capitalism and the State. Asserting or imposing a truth is a way of canceling out politics, of masking relations of power in order to declare victory in the fight for liberation that is never-ending. In reality, there is no truth, only the struggle for it. Every time a power regime—like capitalism or colonialism—is overthrown, there is a risk of establishing a new truth in its place, which in turn has to be criticized, resisted, and overturned.

In his book, Harcourt argues that critical theory got off track roughly 40 years ago when it became too tied to academic settings, stopped focusing on how to change society rather than just understand it and started to produce its own set of supposedly universal truths. But nothing about anarchism makes it immune to such traps either.

What kinds of truths do we need to avoid? One is the ideal of liberalism, which a lot of critical theory is devoted to dissecting and tearing down. Liberalism is built on the myth that a society of laws and constitutions can leave everyone free to pursue their own ideals without getting in anyone else's way. The contention is that there's no reason, for exam-



ple, that NRA members can't indulge their gun fetish while African Americans attend church in safety, because the law regulates their interactions. Do we really believe this?

At the same time, liberals deplore violence—but define the term so narrowly that it becomes an excuse to avoid acting. Thinkers from Benjamin to Marcuse have argued that violence is everywhere, from the violent taking of Indigenous people's lands to urban policing to slum clearance to the poisoning of Flint, Michigan's water supply. We're just not allowed to call it that. But actually, political change always inflicts violence on someone in some form, whether it comes from the right or the left. Once people understand the nature and impact of particular forms of violence, it's a lot harder to convince them that burning a patrol car, for example, is as heinous as evicting a low-income family from their home.

Critical theory also raises some thorny issues that anarchists need to confront. Much of anarchist organizing revolves around a pursuit of consensus as a basis for action. But consensus relies on people's reasonableness or rationality, as Harcourt points out, on the existence of some kind of rational truth that we can all subscribe to. Consensus, on the surface, appears to be the least oppressive form of decision-making. But what if it can produce its own form of oppression: another way to cancel or deny the fact that politics has always been about struggle and conflict, and always will be?

Power is another sticky problem. Anarchism is about minimizing or eliminating the exercise of power by one individual or group over another, and maximizing cooperation. Critical theorists like Foucault looked at power in a completely different way; it's everywhere, in the air we breathe, circulating all through our social relationships. We can't eliminate it, only work with it. The theorists may be wrong, but it's up to us to address their point.

Anarchists and critical theorists probably never will find themselves in complete harmony—particularly on the pivotal matter of the relationship between the State and capitalism. But we can keep learning from each other, and sharpening our thinking in the areas where we disagree. What we share is a desire to make theory something practical, a tool for sustaining a real and effective opposition to the ever-more enveloping system of the State and capitalism, not a self-reflexive exercise.

Before we can be effective either as revolutionaries, or insurrectionists, or autonomists, we need to learn how to be in a world that makes struggle and emancipation essentially synonymous.

Eric Laursen is a writer and activist and the author of *The Operating System: An Anarchist Theory of the State* (AK Press, 2021).

1960s draft card burning

## Good-bye to the Draft?

The Selective Service Repeal Act of 2021 was introduced in Congress on April 14 with bipartisan support in both the House and the Senate. If this becomes law, registering for the hated draft will no longer be required.

The draft laws have always contradicted the 13th Amendment that forbids involuntary servitude. The draft laws are the worst kind, forcing citizens to do the dirty, and often criminal work of the government in its endless wars, almost all of which are based on lies.

The Selective Service Repeal Act would:

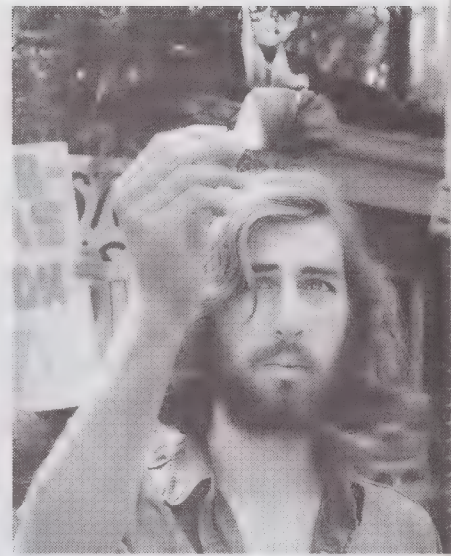
- Repeal the Military Selective Service Act, in its entirety;
- Repeal Presidential authority to order registration for a military draft;
- Abolish the Selective Service System and local draft boards in every county in the U.S.;
- Repeal all Federal sanctions for not having registered with the Selective Service System; and preempt all state sanctions for non-registration.

The same day the repeal act was introduced in Congress, the Biden administration, the darling of the liberals, filed a Supreme Court brief asking the court not to consider a case challenging the Constitutionality of the current Selective Service registration requirement.

The Biden administration ordered more U.S. battle-ready troops to Europe in April in response to what it says was a Russian troop mobilization on the Ukraine-Russian border. Also, it approved sophisticated arms sales to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) assuring the deaths of more civilians in the Middle East by weapons marked "Made in USA."

Whether it was blackmail over pee tapes the Russians had on Trump, or if he was a conscious agent of Putin, or just wanted to build a Trump Moscow Tower (the most probable explanation), the former president wanted to unwind the Cold War II initiated by Obama, and now ramped back up again by Biden.

Thank you to Edward Hasbrouck at [resisters.info/newsletter.html](https://resisters.info/newsletter.html) for the information in this article. The opinions are those of the Fifth Estate.







Brutal police crackdowns in Belarus prompted hundreds of women to protest in Minsk, August 2020.

## Anarchy in Belarus

### *Anti-authoritarian Voices in Uprising Against the Dictatorship*

**BILL WEINBERG**

**T**he former Soviet republic of Belarus exploded into angry protests last August in the wake of contested presidential elections resulting in a totally implausible landslide victory for long-ruling strongman Alexander Lukashenko. Police, riot squads and army troops unleashed harsh repression, using rubber bullets, flash-bang grenades and water-hoses against demonstrators who objected to the results in the capital of Minsk and other cities.

Lukashenko, in power since 1994, was challenged in the election by opposition candidate Svetlana Tikhanovskaya—a surprise replacement for her husband Sergei, a popular blogger who was arrested after attempting to launch a presidential campaign. She held large rallies in Minsk and other cities, riding a groundswell of popular discontent with Lukashenko. After the vote, Tikhanovskaya was expelled by the Belarusian KGB to Lithuania as spontaneous protests broke out. From exile, Tikhanovskaya issued a call for continued protests to force Lukashenko from power.

Since then, protests have been held every weekend. Industrial strikes spread across the country as sectors of the working class broke from the regime-controlled labor unions

to organize independently. Over the past months, tens of thousands have been detained, and hundreds have been subjected to torture.

Anarchist Black Cross Belarus has been specifically monitoring repression against anarchists and anti-fascists in the ongoing protest wave. One member of the group, known as “Sonya,” spoke with Fifth Estate via email.

**Fifth Estate:** What has been the role of anarchists in the current protest movement?

**Sonya:** Anarchists have been a small but active minority. At the beginning (August 9-12), anarchists were not identifying themselves with flags or slogans. There were skirmishes with police and the army. The forces of Lukashenko’s order were extremely brutal, and it was important, in order to survive, to run fast and to look like you just went out to buy some milk and had no relation to protests.

Later, in September and October, there were anarchist flags and slogans visible at the bigger protests in Minsk, but even then a significant portion of anarchists were participating in the protests without marking themselves specifically as anarchists—again, in order to escape potential arrest.

At the same time, anarchists are very active in online agitation. Some anarchist channels on the messaging app





## Due to anarchist involvement in the protests, anarchists will likely be seen by at least some part of the political spectrum as legitimate participants in political life.

Telegram rose to prominence, such as the one of Mikola Dziadok (FE note: see details below).

Direct action including the destruction of cops' property became widespread last autumn, but it is hard to discern which part of it was performed by anarchists. Certainly, some anarchists were involved in some such actions. Usually, no one claims responsibility for them.

**FE:** What are your thoughts on Svetlana Tikhanovskaya and the opposition leadership?

**S:** They are politicians, like all other politicians. We do not think any of them is in principle better than Macron or Biden. Anarchists believe that the change of political regime will bring a window of opportunity to repeal the most notorious anti-labor and anti-activist legislation, and to address certain environmental and social issues. We are not for Tsikhanouskaya, we are against Lukashenko.

**FE:** What is the state of the struggle at this moment, and what are the odds Lukashenko will step down?

**S:** Right now, protests have calmed down, especially in provincial cities and towns. There are several hundred political prisoners, and this number is constantly on the rise. Trials are going on every day. Thousands of protesters, perhaps several tens of thousands, have gone abroad. But many people await a new wave of protests in the spring, since the conflict was suppressed, but not resolved in any way. Authorities offered no trade-offs at all.

Lukashenko's regime is facing numerous economic and political challenges. Its position is shakier than at any time since the 1990s. It is unclear how and how soon the situation will resolve. Now, it is at a stalemate.

**FE:** How do you see the position of anarchists in a post-Lukashenko order?

**S:** Due to anarchist involvement in the protests, we likely will be seen by at least some part of the political spectrum as legitimate participants in political life. This will make it easier to hold political campaigns and sustain anarchist media.

**FE:** How many anarchist comrades have been arrested or disappeared? What do we know about their whereabouts, condition, and the charges they face?

**S:** All told, since the beginning of protests, nine anarchists and five anti-fascists have been arrested in Belarus on criminal charges. One more Belarusian anti-fascist was ar-

rested in Moscow and awaits extradition on protest-related charges. Some anarchists managed to escape abroad before they could be arrested.

Fortunately, no anarchists have disappeared so far. Some were kidnapped, arrested illegally, like Mikola Dziadok, who went underground in July, and was arrested on Nov. 11. Cops tortured him all night long in order to get access to his computer, Telegram, and other channels of communication. Unfortunately, they succeeded. They only gave information about his detention to relatives and the lawyer after the tortures ended.

Anarchists organized a series of attacks on symbols of the state violence, police stations. They were caught near the Ukrainian border while trying to leave the country.

Four anti-fascists face charges of fighting with police on Sept. 23 when Minsk was loudly and massively protesting against Lukashenko's inauguration.

Several dozen anarchists and anti-fascists went through short-term detention of several weeks long. Some, like Ivan Krasouski, are survivors of police torture and had to spend time in hospital to treat injuries after their release.

**FE:** What kind of solidarity do you need from activists in the United States?

**S:** You can do solidarity actions such as in front of Belarusian embassies and consulates, or simply at the central square of your town. Solidarity action days happen periodically. You can follow our website for calls at [abc-belaurs.org](http://abc-belaurs.org). You can spread the word about the Belarusian situation.

Solidarity with Belarusian refugees, including anarchists and anti-fascists, is needed, although most refugees are in Europe.

Donations to ABC Belarus are always welcome, as we face mounting costs to support prisoners and their families.

One can also support those Belarusian anarchists who are not in jail by donating money to the same ABC (with a streetfund" designation. Such money will be used to cover expenses of Belarusian anarchists who had to go underground like paying rent, purchasing equipment such as megaphones or medical first aid kits, printing leaflets, etc.

Probably, the best support is inspiration. A popular insurrection in the States would be quite helpful in this sense!

Bill Weinberg blogs daily on global autonomy struggles at [CounterVortex.org](http://CounterVortex.org)



# Future Shock: 2077

STEPHEN CLINE

**T**he prisons? Open. The army? Disbanded.

And much more, besides.

Capitalism's debraining machines have ceased all their debraining. Capitalism's debraining machines lay rusty kudzu covered dead gone utterly forgotten.

It's a love sex & shamanism world now, baby, yeah it's everywhere ya look. Here, now, in this strange and marvelous and most lackadaisical of places—we all wear masks. Cuz we're tricksters, kiddo, cuz we're Monkey cuz we're Crow. The ol' Br'er Rabbit, reincarnated. But these masks of futurekind, they aren't like any old mask that you knew from the waybackwhen, no siree.

These masks, they show our true face. I'm talking 'bout the one hiding behind the skin, ya know—the one behind those sedimentary layers of civilized socialized squawk. And we can talk to the animals now too, kiddo, hell, and some of us even are animals now. Yes indeedy. But what of that thieving old raccoon, you ask, and what of that cantankerous, work shirking possum?

Well, it ain't no secret there, it really ain't, silly youngin'. With open arms (and open trash cans), we summoned them both, we did. They heard The Call, and joined up in our little anarcho-menagerie. And we gave them a membership card without a second thought, all dues all expenses paid in full. Because in this future commune-carnival of ours, both the furry and the scaley are and will always be quite welcome.

To all our critter friends, a standing order of "Y'all come back now" has been issued. And they do, oh boy, they sure do.

The Pentagon? Just a cocoon for dragonflies these days, and a tree-house for a few dozen purple hippos. Ah, and just what do we all do with all this newfound free time, you ask me? Well. These days, most people walk the abandoned, green-stained streets with at least one foot firmly planted in



an oh so succulent Dreamland—and sometimes, with as many as two, or even three or even four feet!

On Saturdays, fields of blissed out comrades will often be found cavorting in the old palm tree garden, pulling five or seven grinning ripe oranges down and out from the mouth of a yawning caterpillar-ant hanging nearby.

And our Fridays are taken up primarily with amusing conversations and ever lively debates with our neighboring ghosts goblins and other such spectrals. Sex? Well, it's hardly counts as "sex" anymore, or at least, not the sex that you neanderthals knew. We first run ourselves a nice hot bath, snort two-mind millipedes, and go into a real fine trance.

At some point, a funky sorta transmigration will occur. We become a spoon, or a copper kettle, or a sponge, or other such

thing. Our "inanimate objective" achieved, we clean a dish, perhaps, or boil a soup, or carry sugar into some stranger's waiting coffee. Once our object's task has been completed, we drop out a furious climax into that unsuspecting universe, and "spiral out" in five dimensions. Bazonk!

And then? Somewhere out there in that weird and wacky world of ours, a baby humanoid will be suddenly dropped out from a seventeen-foot red Aztec orchid mamma, and will cry, and then be adopted by a passing colony of polite tarantula, and taught all the "proper ways." Well! And there ya have it, my old friend, there ya have it. This is it—the world of the future. And it's a real humdinger. Boy oh boy. Kropotkin's golden carousal, made (finally!) flesh.

Steven Cline co-edits the journal *Peculiar Mormyrid* and participates in a local surrealist group in Atlanta, playing games, reciting dreams, and generally living the good surreal life. [stevenclineart.com](http://stevenclineart.com). Collage by Steven Cline.



Sexbot Take-over

# She Exists Only to Please

JESS FLARITY

**L**ove dolls. Robo-whores. Slutbots. Synthetic options. Whatever you call the life-sized Barbies made by California-based Abyss Creations and other companies around the world, these 70-lb, orifice-slotted mannequins have one primary purpose: to be the ever-obedient, surrogate sexual partners of their owners, which are almost always men.

The 2018 documentary, *Silicone Soul*, encapsulates the current state of the love doll phenomenon in the U.S. with a lens of quiet, journalistic accuracy, as its director Melody Gilbert invites her viewer into the everyday lives of several of these men—and one woman—to show how it's not only deranged sex addicts who are purchasing what are essentially elaborate, \$6,000 pocket pussies, but a range of men in various states of emotional crisis when it comes to forming relationships with women (the lone woman featured in the film uses her dolls for artistic purposes and photo shoots—she doesn't allude to fucking them).

The latest twist on this classic masculine issue, which goes back two thousand years to Ovid's *Pygmalion*, is Abyss Creations' recent attempt to create a doll that has artificial intelligence.

So, if your splooge-soaked, animatronic spunkbot could talk, what would "she" want to say?

**T**hus enters the conundrum seen in Alex Garland's 2014 sci-fi thriller, *Ex Machina*, which ends with vengeful A.I. gynoids successfully murdering their rapist-creator, a narrative arc which creates all kinds of problems for feminist theorists because it further reinforces the idea that rebellion itself is codified into a feminized body.

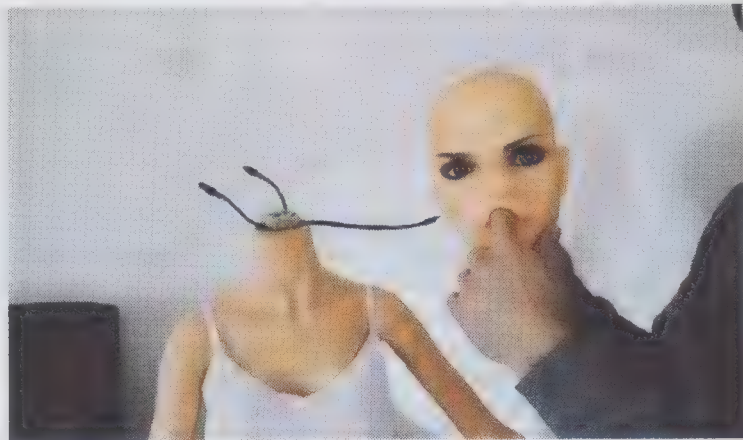
And yet, like too many episodes of the British television series *Black Mirror*, near-future fictions such as *Ex Machina* are transforming into reality. Abyss Creations' founder Matt McCullen recently stated that sensors can now be positioned throughout a mannequin's rubber vagina and connected to its sexy smartbot brain. Using a recording ripped off of any porno, or, possibly for a premium, Scar Jo's husky voice from Spike Jonze's *Her*, your A.I.-enhanced sexbot can experience a real fake orgasm before you have to unscrew its crotch mechanism and rinse it out in your bathroom sink (additional sensors installed in the doll's plastic clitoris will probably cost extra, contributing to the idea that the necessity of robo-clitoral stimulation is all just a myth).

It's unlikely Abyss Creations' ironically named Harmony

A.I. doll is going to upset the entire sexual economy—we are still far away from Matt Groening's *Futurama* episode where humanity almost goes extinct because teenagers start fucking robots instead of each other.

What we're witnessing is a variant of Moore's law, but instead of microchip processing power increasing every couple of years while the cost of production is halved, the sex doll simulacrum is marching ever closer towards the uncanny valley as more and more introverted, socially awkward dudes can afford to upgrade their fleshlight+waifu pillow combination to an actual Real Doll, even on their shitty retail worker's wage. In *Silicone Soul*, several of these men, including the infamous synthetic love activist, iDollator Davecat, state that their dolls love them because they "created their personalities to love them." This tract of thinking will continue even if these objects have some sort of pseudo-A.I. lodged into their microprocessor-filled heads.

No matter how intelligent these programs become, the doll will continue to be an expensive toy for men with borderline personality disorders or mild forms of schizophrenia



who are unable to form functional relationships with real women, especially for those who feel they've been slighted or jilted by their former wives and lovers.

**W**hat's perhaps more important to these men than a satisfying orgasm is their sense of total power and control over their synthetic partners. The personification of the dolls goes so far that they create social media profiles and "talk" through them—and their owner's voice is lost in the imagined voices of these "women" who exist in a realm of cognitive dissonance that makes them both real and not real.

Relationships between humans and other humans will always be messy, imperfect dualities that often feel out of balance: it's your turn to pay for dinner. . . we went to your parents' place last weekend. . . These types of conversations are unavoidable roadblocks that require emotional labor to navigate and overcome in order for any relationship to succeed. Some men are simply unable, or unwilling, to put in the work necessary to maintain this connection.



Most young men today are more than happy to do the minimum effort necessary on the “pussy slot machines” of modern dating apps rather than hump an exaggerated chunk of silicone the size of a large dog.

But for others, this ultimate technological solution is more than ideal, and so long as they have the cash and aren't fussy about cleaning their own jizz out of a texturized rubber tube, these feminized sexbots will only continue advancing into the unknown abyss of our techno-sexual future.

There are a lot of men out there who prefer what's easy

compared to what's real, and an inert lump of ceramic and carbon transforms rather quickly into the perfect illusion, as echoed by a common phrase stated throughout *Silicone Soul*: she exists only to please.

Jess Flarity is a PhD student in Literature at the University of New Hampshire and a graduate of the Stonecoast MFA program. His dissertation on the interaction between feminist theory and science fiction hasn't focused on sex robots . . . yet.

## Letter from the Trenches Can Schools Teach Freedom?

KIM A. BROADIE

**T**he late David Graeber perhaps said it best. “Bureaucracy has become the water in which we swim.”

For over 20 years, I was embedded within the New York City Board of Education as a licensed agent authorized to deploy weapons of mass instruction. These weapons were placed in our arsenal to control, and perhaps teach, but above all avoid scenes like the following, which happened just days after I started:

We heard that the automotive kids stole Braithwaite's car battery. I suppressed a nervous chuckle. It could have been me. It must have happened in broad daylight in the parking lot in front of Wingate High School.

Poor Braithwaite. They drove him out of the school, out of teaching. Soon after that day, I sat down with him in the teacher's lunchroom. He was a man besieged. The administration was taking a hard look at his lack of classroom control.

His students, like jackals, delighted in picking his bones clean. As he lifted his fork, which dangled an inch-long piece of mystery meat, he said he needed to stick it out because his wife was sick. He was enduring this humiliation for her sake. Soon, he would disappear from the school.

Approaching middle-age, this was my second career. I stepped into the world of public education when I entered George Wingate High School in 1994. Location: Crown Heights, Brooklyn, epicenter of race riots between Jews and Blacks. Uncontrollable rage on the streets, rage in the classroom. I, the middle-aged raw rookie, entered that classroom starry-eyed from reading such works as radical educator Paolo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* in which he writes:

“Education either functions as an instrument that is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the



Carla Repice, untitled from the series, “The White Problem.” 2019

logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it Or, it becomes the ‘practice of freedom,’ the means by which men and women deal critically with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world.” Good luck with the second choice. How can you teach freedom if you can't get past the door? Just getting inside the institution required navigating a bureaucratic maze. A Soviet-style people's republic, one colleague called it.



## The system has no conscience. The unwritten axiom of obedience is the DNA of modern education.

It was, and is, as Graeber wrote, “a Utopia of Rules.”

Hell, the only reason I did get in was because I borrowed \$30,000 and lived on baloney sandwiches for a year to get a master's degree; to get a piece of paper from the NYC Board of Education; to get to stand in front of a high school classroom; to get to teach state mandated history. . . provisionally.

And, don't forget the background check, the fingerprinting, the drug tests, the transcripts, etc., etc. All of which were to be paid for by the applicant.

Surviving probation meant controlling students by psychological persuasion and not so subtle coercion. I learned the hard way when my students strolled into my classroom that first week and began rearranging the furniture to their liking.

I was the second new teacher in two weeks. A fact unimportant enough to prevent resuming their private conversations. I didn't realize I was being snubbed. I, the liberator, the cool teacher, would engage them in an interesting dialogue. They were annoyed by my interruption. One student looked up at the blank chalkboard.

“Hey, mister, where's the aim?”

“We don't need an aim.”

That did it. I had just demonstrated my ignorance of accepted norms.

An aim had to be written on the board at the beginning of the class. I was expected to hand them a warmup assignment as they walked in the door. Seating assignments had to be made. Everybody knew that, except me.

*Pedagogy of the Oppressed* didn't mention developmental lesson plans. I was instantly marked as raw meat to be chewed up and spit out, just like Braithwaite. These students now controlled the class. They had the power.

Teachers they didn't like often quit after the first few days. That week there was a French teacher who was assigned cafeteria duty and was hit in the head with a flying plastic tray during a food fight. He later died in the hospital from a brain hemorrhage.

Another teacher, soon after, was carried off in a stretcher, having suffered a fatal heart attack in the middle of her 40-minute lesson. Rumor was the students cheered when she dropped to the floor. Yet another couldn't prevent her class from pushing aside the desks so they could chalk ritualistic pentagrams on the floor.

Part of me cheered their rebellions, the other part feared losing my job.

When my supervisor came in to observe my teaching, he wrote, charitably, that my classroom presented a most confusing situation. I needed to learn how to manage the class in order to guide them through a lesson.

The aim, by the way, had to be in the form of a question that encapsulated the topic of the day, or rather, the 40 minutes I had to instruct them. At the end of 40 minutes, students would be able to answer the question based on what they had learned during those 40 minutes. When the bell rang, they moved on to the next 40-minute lesson. Another topic, another aim, totally unconnected to the last 40 minutes. Confusing. Random. Education, then and now.

Fast forward to Fall 2020. After a few years of retirement, I wanted to get back into the classroom to see what Covid wrought. I landed an assignment at the Harbor School, located on Governor's Island, in the middle of New York's harbor, across from the Statue of Liberty.

Gone were the large high schools. Every high school now has a theme: performing arts, science, law, etc. This high school focused on water: marine biology, seafaring. Every high school had to compete for students, every high school was graded. The theory of this was to offer a more intimate high school experience in line with the students own interests.

In practice, it accentuated the role of public schools as “sorting mechanisms,” as contemporary education theorist John Taylor Gatto said in “The Psychopathic School”, a speech given in 1990. “We are on the way to creating a caste system, complete with untouchables who wander through subway trains and who sleep upon the streets.” The students are filtered through the schools and placed into their socially required slots to maintain the status quo.

The Harbor School was, and is, a gem, despite all these onerous constraints. Covid and the blended learning center on computer-based Zoom lessons, which are also required to be aligned with Core curriculum standards. Nevertheless, they were able to offer a dazzling array of programs that involved using the harbor for hands-on research in marine biology, scuba diving, vessel operations. Against all odds, the faculty and staff radiate enthusiasm, and genuine caring. The principal insists on an egalitarian culture, encouragement and not punishment.

Still, rules are rules. The system has no conscience. The unwritten axiom of obedience is the DNA of modern education. As Gatto says, “[when the bell rings], ... the young man (or woman) in the middle of writing a poem must close his notebook and move to a different cell.”

Such is the water in which we swim. We can hardly imagine otherwise.

Kim Broadie has turned the page on thirty years in public and private education. He lives in New York City and wonders if freedom will survive in an artifact world.



# Teaching the History of Anarchism at the University of Michigan

## From Tolstoy to Pussy Riot

ANIA AIZMAN

**I**n the fall of 2019, I taught a course at the University of Michigan: “Art and Anarchism: from Tolstoy to Pussy Riot.” The curriculum at the Ann Arbor, Michigan college concentrated on Russian anarchists, historic and contemporary, and was designed to be as accessible as possible even for those students with little knowledge of art, or Russia, or history, let alone anarchism.

The course offered creative options for every assignment, stressing that genuine interest was more important than

anarchist software, and other relevant topics. They created stunning final projects including zines (on anarchist comics, reproductive justice, etc.), a performance art event, a talk show, and original musical compositions.

The first half of the course was almost entirely devoted to Russian radical history, trying to understand Bakunin’s and Kropotkin’s ideas in their historical context. We considered social movements that influenced them, such as the 1871 Paris Commune and German social democracy at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century, as well as nationalist independence movements.

We read about the many organizations and individuals involved in the Russian revolutionary movement from the 1860s to 1917 inspired by Bakunin’s and Kropotkin’s philosophies. This part of the class used my in-progress book about Russian anarchism and its influence on the arts.

The second half of the syllabus branched out, following the Russian and Yiddish speaking anarchist emigres to the United States, and then looking at anarchist and anarchist-influenced radical movements in other parts of the world. Students learned about the ongoing discussions and sometimes fierce debates anarchists had with other radicals.



completing the readings. Discussion was facilitated with the assumption that a portion of the students had not prepared for class, and we needed to read a few specific passages from a text so that everyone could follow along.

Students gave feedback on my mini-lectures about historical context and connections to present-day events. They liked the slides of photographs and timelines. They appreciated the stories about the lives of real and fictional revolutionaries. We discussed the big questions: What is revolution and is it possible? How do you make change in the world? What are the issues facing your generation?

My hope was that, as an “easy A” course, it would make space for students to connect their interests to the topic. I was not disappointed. They explored the international Esperanto language historically advocated by many anarchists, anarchism in Argentina and Mexico, anarchist education,

**A**nn Arbor, Michigan, where the university is located, is home to the Joseph A. Labadie Collection, an archive that brings researchers like me from all over the world. It features materials on anarchism, anti-war and pacifist movements, atheism and free thought, civil liberties and civil rights, ecology, labor and workers’ rights, feminism, LGBTQ movements, prisons and prisoners, the New

Left, the Spanish Revolution and Civil War, and youth and student protest.

Archive Curator Julie Herrada provided the class with posters, letters, photographs, and personal effects from social movements. The students were able to visit the collection’s exhibits before Covid and view drawings of the events of the Paris Commune, the IWW songbook, photos of 1968 world-wide student protests, anarchist bookfair posters, and even Emma Goldman’s passport.

To provide the same depth in the non-Russian anarchist part of the syllabus, which was not my expertise, we relied on guest speakers. Margaret Killjoy, whose sci-fi story “The Fortunate Death of Jonathan Sandelson” we read in class, skyped in and talked about anarchism, trans identity, and music.

Daniel Kahn, a Klezmer musician, visited the class and played Yiddish anarchist songs, as well as ones from Wobbly



folksinger and storyteller Utah Phillips and Ani DiFranco.

The fresh, irreverent perspective of local anarchists who are involved in organizing for prison abolition, labor protections, and rent strikes during the COVID-19 emergency also became part of my teaching.

A punk panel of anarchists visited to talk about the contemporary anarchist community in the Detroit-Ann Arbor-Ypsilanti area. They discussed DIY-DIT culture, the Trumbullplex communal living and performance space in Detroit, and organizing against fascism. Via Skype, scholar and Maoist activist Kehaulani Kauanui spoke about indigenous rights and anarchism.

**T**he students absolutely loved these events which exposed them to today's fascinating, diverse and vibrant social justice movements. Teaching the course caused me to reflect on how little many young people know about anarchism, but offered valuable insights about their willingness to learn.

By the end of the term, many of the students developed

research questions within or adjacent to the topic of anarchism. They conducted research without the stresses of a term paper, creating annotated bibliographies of critical/historical literature addressing the research questions. This was another way of encouraging historical inquiry. Two students continued to work with me in an independent study course that further explored the topic. Several still keep in touch.

Overall, this was a valuable experience in connecting local and recent events to the global history of social movements, allowing students to be creative with research questions and assignments, and challenging and questioning our ideas as a group, based on dialogue with a little-understood political philosophy.

Ania Aizman is writing a book on anarchism in Russian culture based on archival research and oral histories with artists, writers, and activists to find missing links between the 19th century anarchist movements, Soviet underground cultures, and contemporary collectives.

## Forest Defenders Building Community

Continued from Page 5

being woven across Germany, and sometimes the threads of individual action intersect and create nodes. Climate camps are exactly that—nodes that connect all the struggles.

The first of them began in Augsburg, a conservative Bavarian city. Dozens of climate activists from the Fridays for Future (FFF) group decided that weekly demonstrations were not enough. Last summer, they occupied the city's central square. They built a wooden utopia in the middle of the shopping district, an eco-anarchist equivalent to Occupy Wall Street.

Like in Danni, they live without authority, cook with dumpstered food and are supported by a network of caring inhabitants. From FFF to eco-anarchy, they were radicalized by the tales of activists traveling from the Danni and Hambi. They, in turn, fostered eco-anarchist resistance in southern Germany.

The intentional family of *Waldbesetzungen* and climate camps is steadily growing. Central squares are being occupied in six other German cities, as are a dozen forests and meadows.

The Altdorfer *Waldbesetzung*, called Alti, is the newest. Since January 2021, the woods, close to the tourist city of Ravensburg, echo with the sound of hammers, music, and campfire tales. Protesting the expansion of mining gravel destined for export to Austria, ten to thirty activists live together, building dozens of tree houses in various neighborhoods, following the model of the other forest occupations.

The young anarchist utopia is strongly supported by the local inhabitants, who cook two meals a day for the activists, donate construction material, and flock to visit the occupation on weekends. Since deforestation season starts in October, the Alti has some more months to prepare for the pending police assault. In the meantime, banner actions, demonstrations and pranks against conservative politicians are carried out daily.

The eco-anarchist utopia is alive and well. It is growing

**Feminist, antiracist and anti-capitalist  
struggles are coming together in the woods.  
Black is the new green.**

steadily as an alternative to the Green Party, which is becoming Germany's new mainstream, and may even lead the government after the next election.

Feminist, antiracist and anti-capitalist struggles are coming together in the woods, because all forms of oppression are interlinked. Black is the new green.

In times of greenwashing, green capitalism, and eco-fascism, the eco-anarchist *Waldbesetzungen* and climate camps offer a combative and beautiful spark of hope.

Philippe Pernot is a German-based photojournalist whose work focuses on anarchy, ecological resistance, and the interconnectedness between feminist, anticapitalist and antiracist struggles. After studying in France, he worked in Lebanon for one year, reporting about the Palestinian situation and those abandoned by the Lebanese state.

He co-published ■ report on a LNG-pipeline project in Quebec and ■ zine about a mall being built in his native village in southern France.





## Then and Now The Spanish Revolution of 1936

MARTHA ACKELSBURG

**J**uly 19 marks the 85<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Spanish Revolution. This seems an opportune time, then, to reflect on multiple aspects of that revolution. It began as a response to an attempted right-wing military coup against the legally-elected left-wing government, unfolded in the midst of a brutal civil war, and came to an end with the victory of fascist armies in the spring of 1939.

Although conditions—both in Spain and elsewhere—have changed dramatically in the years since, there are lessons to be learned from the efforts of worker-led organizations to confront the right-wing challenges of their day.

First, something about the context. Anarcho-syndicalism had been growing in Spain since the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. By 1936, the movement was comprised of a powerful labor union organization (the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo, CNT, National Confederation of Labor) that counted roughly one million workers among its members; an affinity group-based anarchist organization (the Federación Anarquista Ibérica, Iberian Anarchist Federation, FAI); and a youth organization (Federación Ibérica de Juventudes Libertarias, FIJL, Iberian Federation of Libertarian Youth).

These organizations had affiliates in many areas of the country, but were especially strong in Catalonia, Valencia,

Aragon, and Andalucía. A network of journals, newspapers, schools emphasizing freethought, storefront cultural centers, and community/neighborhood-based organizations extended movement influence considerably beyond conventional workplaces, and allowed its anti-hierarchical message of direct action, collective self-help, and anti-authoritarianism to reach both men and women, employed and unemployed, adults and youth.

Importantly, however, although movement organizations had committed themselves from early dates (1872, 1910, and again in 1936) to the equality of men and women as a central component of anarchist/libertarian theory and practice, the day-to-day reality on the ground was quite different.

**M**ost movement organizations, especially labor unions, even in industries such as textiles, where female workers were the majority, were dominated by men. Women workers were often paid lower wages, ignored or ridiculed if they tried to speak in meetings, and dismissed as potential movement leaders or activists.

Accordingly, as early as the mid-1920s, when the CNT unions were still operating clandestinely, and then well into the early 1930s, groups of mostly young anarchist women in Madrid, Barcelona, and elsewhere who had felt marginalized in their organizations, began to meet among themselves to discuss what they could do to empower other women and to challenge their male comrades to live up to the officially-stated commitments to equality.

In early 1936, a group in Barcelona that called itself Grupo Cultural Femenino, CNT, rented a hall in Barcelona



## Here is Antifa! Barcelona, 1936. The popular militias mobilize to fight fascists.

and held a mass meeting to address issues of women's subordination. Participants came from all over the country included among them, Lucía Sánchez Saornil and Mercedes Comaposada, who had met in Madrid and started talking and organizing women there. Together, they decided to form an organization to address the "triple enslavement" of women (to ignorance, to capital, and as women); shortly thereafter, the first issue of a new journal, *Mujeres Libres* (Free Women) appeared.

Much of the historiography of the Spanish Civil War presents it as a battle of Communists vs. fascists for the preservation of republican democracy in Spain. But the reality is that the initial attempted right-wing coup (led by four generals, among them, Francisco Franco) was meant to overthrow the liberal Popular Front coalition that had been elected in April 1936.

**T**he opposition to the coup was led by revolutionary popular organizations, both socialist and anarchist, that took to the streets, stormed armories for weapons, and defeated the right-wing rebels in many major cities. What followed was complex.

Many of the landowners and factory owners who sympathized with the rebels abandoned their properties and fled to the rebel-held zone. This enabled union-based organizations, especially in Barcelona, Valencia and Aragon, to take over workplaces—both rural and industrial—and run them collectively under systems of worker control. In Aragon, in particular, many small agricultural holdings were collectivized.

In many parts of Catalonia, Aragon and Valencia, municipal services were taken over by workers, and reorganized to serve the people who were left in the cities and to organize the provision of food and other necessities. Workers took over factories and repurposed them to produce war materiel.

Men, and some women, left the cities to join people's militias to fight the fascist rebels. Whole systems of social organization were created, virtually overnight.

Meanwhile, internationally, the so-called democratic nations of the west mostly watched and waited. In August, England, France, the U.S., the USSR, Germany and Italy signed a non-intervention agreement, pledging not to send arms or war materiel to either side in the fighting, but Germany and Italy announced almost from the outset that they would not abide by it.

In fact, German and Italian arms and soldiers started pouring into Spain in support of the fascist rebels almost immediately. Germans tested their carpet-bombing techniques (later to be used during WWII) on Guernica and



Madrid. Troops from both countries supported the rebel military's effort to crush the left-wing and anarchist resistance.

Meanwhile, the U.S., UK and France refused aid to the Republic, which was left dependent on the USSR and Mexico for the purchase of arms to try to defeat the rebellion. Over time, that dependence dramatically increased the power of the previously very weak Communist Party in Spain, and eventually led to government efforts to stem the revolution in the name of fighting fascism first.

Contemporary left organizations around the world are confronting a somewhat similar, and often hostile, political, economic and cultural climate. Economic inequality is increasing everywhere. Exacerbated by COVID-related deaths and dislocations, the forces of international finance have been pushing hard against programs that would mitigate the worst consequences of that inequality.

**T**oday's so-called populist resentment that we are witnessing internationally has been fueled precisely by frustration with economic restructuring and a sense that dominant political elites are not paying sufficient attention to those most hurt by economic and technological change. We have seen a weakening of labor movements in many countries through a combination of corruption and anti-labor policies.

At the same time, women's movements are continuing to grow, even though (with the recent exception of Argentina) they have not always been able to stop moves to the right that threaten hard-won rights for greater equality and body autonomy. In many of these respects, we find parallels to the situation that confronted anarcho-syndicalists in Spain, and *Mujeres Libres*, in particular.

The Spanish economy of the 1930's was very unevenly developed and characterized by extreme levels of inequality. The election of the Popular Front government in 1936 both generated high expectations for change on the part of working people, but fueled the fears of landowners and industrialists about precisely such demands for change.

Meanwhile, international capital, frightened by strikes and talk of revolution, abandoned the legally-elected gov-



ernment and largely sided with Franco and his fascist forces. The ability of the government to develop and implement policies to benefit its working-class supporters was severely limited. In areas where left organizations were strong, particularly in Catalonia, around Madrid, and in Valencia, workers took over factories abandoned by their owners, collectivized many rural properties, and attempted to meet their needs through direct action.

In this context, Mujeres Libres advocated for the full and equal incorporation of women into the resistance, the revolutionary project, and the planning for the world they struggled to bring into being. As opposed to those who said that the time was not right for attention to women's issues, and that they should wait "until the morrow of the revolution," they insisted that the only way to win the war and to achieve its revolutionary goals was to engage women, to enable them to overcome their illiteracy and their subordinate status, and to participate fully in the society.

**T**hey did not—could not—rely on government to meet their needs, to offer literacy classes, or training and apprenticeship programs, or to provide for child-care. In the midst of full-scale civil war, they developed practices to create the world in which they wished to live. They demanded that their comrades acknowledge and respect their differences as women, and their specific concerns about sexuality, support for and planning for maternity and child-care, and broad-based education, even as they insisted on being treated as fully equal members of the libertarian community.

While their activities, and the revolutionary project in general, were brought to a halt by the victory of fascist forces in the spring of 1939, the revolutionary legacy continues. Activists who went into exile in southern France, in Mexico, or in Canada retained their commitments, joined local union organizations, and forged long-term political relationships with younger people in their adopted communities.

Their stories of struggle, disappointment, and triumphs still inspire.

Martha Ackelsberg is the author of *Free Women of Spain: Mujeres Libres and the Struggle for the Emancipation of Women* (AK Press), and of numerous articles and book chapters on women's activism in Spain, the United States and Latin America. She lives in New York City and devotes her time to activism around issues of racial justice.

See FifthEstate.org, home page at bottom, for the FE Spanish Revolution Resource Page.



See our Spanish Revolution Resource page at FifthEstate.org



On 26 July 1953, the Moncada Barracks in Santiago de Cuba was attacked by rebels led by Fidel Castro. The Cuban national holiday is on this date each year. —photo: Peter Werbe

## OCTAVIO ALBEROLA

**T**he Cuban state has usually been able to keep a tight lid on protests. Generally, it only allows demonstrations that have been organized by government ministries. However, during the fall and winter of 2020-21 the dissident San Isidro Movement in Havana began publicly defying the rules by demonstrating for freedom of expression for artists. The government responded with intimidation and even arrests.

Another group, comprised of 300 Cubans of several professions and political persuasions in Cuba and abroad, recently signed an open letter to U.S. President Biden, asking him to end the economic blockade of Cuba. The letter acknowledges the United States is not solely responsible for the problems facing the country, and that the Cuban state is far from democratic. But it is only admitted privately by some of the signatories that Cuban government restrictions on freedom also prevent solving the island's economic problems.

In February, in response to these expressions of dissent, the regime announced the expansion of regulations and security measures to prohibit protests in the Havana neighborhoods where Cuba's powerful elite usually live and work, including state ministries and other government buildings, as well as areas where tourists shop.

Official history dates the birth of the Cuban Revolution from the triumphal entry of the guerrillas into Havana on



January 1, 1959. But it was not until April 16, 1961 that Fidel Castro declared the nation was undertaking what he characterized as a socialist revolution, initiating the eradication of the exploitation of some people by others.

The daily life of Cuban workers has belied the proclaimed emancipatory objective of the revolution. It served as an ideological justification for the seizure and retention of power. Castro's socialism was actually a simple Caribbean expression of Eastern European style state capitalism.

In reality, the regime has never tried to fulfill the promise of eradicating capitalist exploitation or suppressing class differences.

It expropriated and nationalized the means of production and consumption, making the State and its bureaucracy managers, keeping everyone else as employees and servants. Workers have been denied the right to organize in autonomous unions, to defend their class interests. Anarchists and others who tried to defend self-management of work places have been repressed.

Starting in 1964, the Soviet Union assisted the Cuban state through trade concessions, including purchasing sugar at a price higher than the world market. In 1989, the Soviet Union collapsed and its economic support ended. To cope with the economic difficulties this caused, at the beginning of the 1990s what was known as the Special Period was initiated.

The government invited foreign investment in tourism, free-trade zones, and joint-venture projects that produce goods and services most Cubans could not buy. They were barred from markets, hotels, hospitals and recreation centers that were only open to diplomats, tourists and Cubans who were able to obtain dollars through jobs catering to foreign visitors or from families abroad.

At the same time, the supply of basic ration products from the state-run supermarkets was diminished. The majority of the population continued to live under austere conditions, and for some, poverty was intensified. Many had to commit illegal acts to survive, such as workplace theft and engaging in prostitution (the *jineteras*) with tourists.

All this enabled the regime and the party to increase their authority over Cuban society. By legalizing some forms of private employment, the government was able to set the rules and demand tax payments. It intensified competitiveness while suppressing cooperative endeavors and solidarity. It also stymied attempts at making the society freer and more egalitarian.

The reforms begun in the 1990s, and increased since Fidel left leadership of the State to his brother Raúl in 2006, have been concentrated in the economic sphere. The only changes made have been those needed to maintain the traditional relationship between the elite and society.

When Chávez became president of Venezuela at the turn

of the 21st century, that country began providing economic assistance to the Cuban state. The Cuban authorities resumed primary reliance on centralized supervision and nationalized enterprises. Nevertheless, many Cubans remained economically deprived.

In 2006, Fidel's brother Raúl took over the presidency and restrictions on private enterprise began to be loosened again. From 2007 on, Cubans were allowed to stay in any hotel in their country, rent a vehicle or a tourist motorcycle



**“Neither the San Isidro Movement nor the other initiatives question the government’s holding on to capitalism in one form or another.”**

and spend their vacation in a tourist establishment on the island (depending on their resources). The laws for selling real estate and cars were also loosened.

In 2011, 181 previously illegal private occupations were legalized. These included such jobs as self-employed taxi drivers and shoeshine services. Two years later, 201 more occupations were made legal. In addition, Cubans were allowed to legally leave the country for two years without losing the right of residence. The reforms of immigration laws in 2016 and 2018 enabled Cubans who had left the country illegally before 2013 to visit the island.

In 2019, Raúl Castro retired from the presidency, and Miguel Mario Díaz-Canel Bermúdez replaced him. During the subsequent year, several reforms were announced to address economic and health problems afflicting the country.

As part of the celebration of the 62nd anniversary of the so-called revolution, Díaz-Canel announced new economic regulations decided upon by the Communist Party, to take



Airport at Holguin, Cuba  
Sign reads in English "Socialism or Death." It remains even though increased capitalist activity is permitted. —photo: Peter Werbe

See the Fifth Estate Cuban Revolution Resource page at [www.FifthEstate.org](http://www.FifthEstate.org)

Octavio Alberola works with the Support Group for Independent Libertarians and Syndicalists in Cuba (GALSIC), among other activities. He is the author of *El Anarquismo Español y La Acción Revolucionaria (1961-1974)* and *Miedo a la Memoria*.

effect on January 1, 2021. These included fixing monetary exchange rates between the dollar and peso. The government will also permit more categories of self-employment to help people survive in the midst of the serious crisis. Nevertheless, a list of 124 forbidden occupations remains.

Díaz-Canel assured the population that permission to participate in the private sector will be on the basis of guaranteeing all Cubans equal opportunities, rights and social justice, by promoting interest and motivation for work. It remains a government managed process, not one involving equality and opportunities for self-managed choices.

State capitalism is giving way more and more to private capitalism. The much-vaunted reforms will result in reductions in government subsidies, such as income and rent assistance, free health care for people with low incomes and other support for poor people. This change from relying primarily on state capitalism to empowering private enterprise is justified as making the Cuban economy more efficient.

The reforms came in time for people to celebrate the New Year and the 62nd anniversary of the Revolution according to each one's wallet (some in palaces, others in huts) as in any capitalist country.

Over the years, the Cuban rulers have continually rejected and repressed proposals and attempts from inside and outside revolutionary circles to democratize and influence the so-called Revolution towards truly emancipatory objectives. They have acted against such attempts with equal or greater zeal than they have against the right-wingers exiled in Miami, who would like to reinstall bourgeois democracy on the island.

Nothing indicates that a more democratic or liberatory outcome is on the horizon for Cuba very soon. Given this reality, during the regime's time in power the majority of Cubans have sought ways to survive in a country where everything depends on the State. Dissenters have met with repression and large numbers of people have left the island. In these circumstances, it has not been possible to develop

broad opposition capable of expressing real alternatives to the regime. Only a fragmented and polarized political spectrum currently exists.

There are social explosions and there is much frustration and discontent, but different groups are responding to their own narrow issues with limited demands. As a result, emancipatory perspectives for the society as a whole have remained undeveloped.

Neither the San Isidro Movement nor the other initiatives question the government's holding onto capitalism in one form or another. Hence, no matter how much media noise is made about such initiatives, it is not from them that emancipatory or even democratizing perspectives will emerge for the Cuban people.

Although ideologists of the status quo often say that capitalism supports democracy, in fact, there have been and are many examples of capitalism supporting dictatorships of all kinds. In the Cuban situation, the ongoing drift towards private capitalism is compatible with maintenance of the dictatorship of one-party government with the extension of the business economy to all sectors of economic activity (except the 124 prohibited ones). It is to be a gradual process managed by the same elite that has controlled the government and the party during the 62 years of the so-called Revolution.

Being aware of this does not prevent us from continuing to desire and advocate for a society where all public affairs are resolved through the self-organization of those of us who live, work, create and love, in Cuba and worldwide. As anarchists we look forward to the end of wage labor, imposed authority, the cult of personality, direct structural and symbolic violence, hyper-competitiveness, bureaucracy, decisions in the hands of an elite, concentration of wealth and unequal appropriation of knowledge.

This is what Cuban anarchists want and what all the world's anarchists fight for.

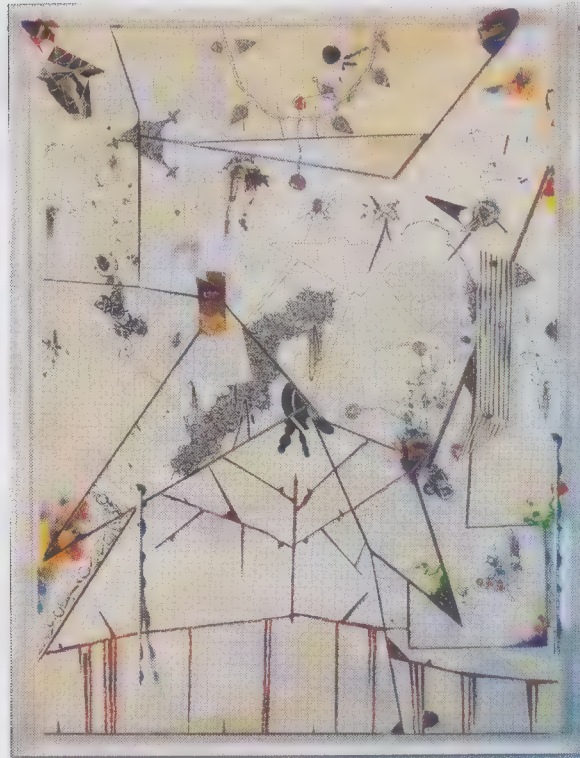
[Translation from Spanish by FE staff.]



# An Anarchist Review of Books

**Ideas without action is passivity. Action without ideas leads nowhere**

"Flowers for Bakunin"  
— Lars van Dooren



## Deserving The Best: The Continuing Appeal of Surrealism

### **Surrealism: Inside the Magnetic Fields**

Penelope Rosemont  
City Lights Books 2020

#### **MAX CAFARD**

**I** used to know an amazing old working-class philosopher (an electrician) and practical utopian who had a wonderful phrase to sum up his inspired anarchism: "We deserve the best."

"The best" means, as Penelope Rosemont shows in this book, what the surrealists call "the marvelous," a world of beauty, joy, and goodness. "We," means everybody, of course.

The great promise of the most life-affirming and world-affirming forms of anarchism has always been our

participation in creating (really the Earth creating, through us) such a world for all. This is the spirit of ecstatic anarchy that animates Penelope Rosemont's writing, and which she exudes through her own life.

It is easy to associate anarchism with protest, radical critique, and that old classic, struggle. But what wins people over is such a vision of the world of "the best" for all, and, even more, the actual existence of a small communities of people beginning to realize it in their everyday life. This book is about that kind of community creating that kind of world.

It begins in the Fall of 1964, with the meeting of youthful student revolutionaries and visionaries Penelope and Franklin Rosemont. Together, they discovered the enchanted world of surrealism and gave birth to the North American



## Surrealism is about **creative rebirth, regeneration, & the pulse of life.**

surrealist movement. From that point on, they were to be at the center of that movement, or perhaps we should say, that magic circle, that enchanted vortex.

Penelope recounts their exploits with their “proto-surrealist” *Rebel Worker* group. The group took its name from its mimeo publication with that title, inspired both by surrealist rebellion and that of the anarchists and Wobblies whose history surrounded them in Chicago. The group ran the Solidarity Bookstore, which sold surrealist, anarchist, Marxist, and IWW literature. As Penelope has explained, their goal was nothing less than total revolution, beginning right where they were, and then radiating out in every direction.

The *Rebel Worker* was a key part of their “revolution in the service of the marvelous,” to borrow the title of one of Franklin’s books. Penelope says that they “were fascinated by the printed word.” She adds that “Even now I’m amazed at the ability of the word to conjure up images, images leading to thoughts, to ideas, to states of mind, to a whole psychic chain of perception that, in fact, is capable of renewing the world.”

**T**hus, surrealism is about creative rebirth, regeneration, and the pulse of life. And the Word is part of that process. She refers to the surrealist project of “rescuing the verb.” Yes, the Word is a verb, a very active one, and is the expression of motion and vital force. This idea is reminiscent of the Word or Logos of the ancient dialectician Heraclitus. It is that ever-transforming flow into which you can’t step, even once. You’re already in it, and if you allow it to overwhelm you, it carries you away to extraordinary places.

With this inspiration, Penelope and Franklin and their comrades began to explore the many regions of Surreality: convulsive beauty, the secrets of the unconscious, automatic writing, and their own ability to create miraculous new images. They were Rebel Workers With A Cause, a cause which included producing and distributing three thousand copies of the magazine, at a time when publishing was a much more demanding labor of love than it is now. And since they had a good sense of priorities, they also found time to help a group of nine-year-olds produce materials of propaganda for their grade school anti-war protests.

However, even in the midst of all this frenetic creative fervor, Penelope and Franklin dreamed of “wandering the streets of Paris directed by chance alone,” and of meeting André Breton and other famous surrealists. So, in December 1965, during a lull in the creative Maelstrom of Chicago they decided to make their dreams an immediate reality, and were soon off, first for a stop in England, and then for Paris itself.

As Penelope relates in one of the greatest of her many great stories, the dream almost turned into a nightmare when they landed in England. Thanks to—big surprise!—

the state. Suspicious of their beatnik looks and Franklin’s prime draft age, the agents of the Repressive State Apparatus carried out their assigned task. Rejecting his claim of a student deferment, they tagged the couple as radical draft-resisting beatnik would-be illegal immigrants who should be sent back to the U.S. on the next plane. But fortuitously, when the British officials found that there was a more expedient means of purging the UK of these dangerous subversive elements, they were put on the next plane for France instead.

As it turned out, the state had done them the great favor of expediting their arrival in surrealist Paris. It was just in time for the famed International Surrealist Exhibition, *L’Écart Absolu*, or “Absolute Divergence.” Not only were they about to see works of Marcel Duchamp, Man Ray, Max Ernst, and many other surrealist eminences, they would almost immediately find themselves at the Paris Surrealists’ 1965 New Year’s Eve party, celebrating well into the early morning with skits, charades, stories, songs, “riotous laughter,” a chorus line and a striptease, all in grand surrealist style. They were transported to another world, the milieu of the *merveilleux*. And, much of this book consists of tales of the surrealists they met there.

**W**e learn of Jean-Claude Silberman, who assumed the role of Surrealist Investigator, wandering the streets of Paris posing to pedestrians such non-pedestrian questions as “If someone came to the door and said the police were after them, would you let them in?” Or, visiting the lost and found of the Paris Metro to undertake an analysis of the nature and psycho-ontological implications of found objects.

We also discover the amazing Ted Joans, African-American “Surrealist Griot,” poet of Black Power and Beatitude, and founder of a movement to rename Lake Victoria in east Africa, “Lake Satchmo.” Franklin went on to co-edit the groundbreaking collection *Black, Brown and Beige: Surrealist Writings from Africa and the Diaspora* (University of Texas Press, 2009), which is dedicated to Ted Joans, and includes several of his works.

Another principal protagonist is Mimi Parent, who contributed to the *Écart Absolu* exhibition the anti-militarist installation “Arc de dérouté,” or “Arch of Defeat.” This wooden-legged détournement of the Arc de Triomphe was large enough for visitors to walk under—and perhaps come under its subversive spell.

We also encounter the early gender revolutionary Toyen, a gifted painter and one of the founders of Czech surrealism. She, along with her friend Styrsky, cofounded the artistic movement “Artificialism,” which took the pursuit of maximum imaginativeness as the supreme aesthetic value, and prefigured abstract expressionism.

The longest section on a single person is devoted to Le-



onora Carrington, who is a huge presence in the book. Its cover features Carrington's enigmatic and haunting painting *Ikon*. Penelope says that Carrington had a "profound effect" on her, and that the latter was responsible, in fact, for "making a feminist out of her." This leads to a final major aspect of this book.

For one has done more than Penelope has to establish beyond question the central place of women in the surrealist movement. She does this above all in her massive and magnificent 1998 collection, *Surrealist Women: An International Anthology*, and she does it again in the present work. In the *Anthology*, Penelope writes of her goal of "preparing the way" for a "fortuitous encounter" between "feminism's visionary, utopian, romantic, anarchist, and revolutionary socialist heritage," and the universe of surrealism.

Her work is an unexcelled effort to unite these two revolutionary tendencies in a common quest for a world of beauty, joy, wonder and creativity for all, and in a common struggle to finally extirpate the absurd and brutal form of insanity called patriarchy.

She offers a strikingly beautiful evocation of what the romantic, anarchistic, revolutionary, surrealist, feminist utopia means in concluding the book with a wondrous, whimsical,

and wise vision of an imagined "Restless, Reckless Rendezvous of Women Surrealists."

Before reading this book, I asked it for a message about itself. I opened it randomly and it replied, "subtle but sure." How true, O Book! Penelope's account of the world of surrealism has none of the usual heavy-handed presumptuousness of those self-proclaimed experts on art and cultural movements who offer authoritative guides to the uninitiated.

Instead, she relates her own experience: how she subtly but surely, in amazing feats of negative capability, opens herself up to the magic and magnetic forces that pulse and vibrate through the real and surreal, and then transmits the magic and magnetism to us, her fortunate readers.

Out of this subtle force, the *wuwei* of effortless doing without doing, arises a tremendous creative and transfigurative power and energy.

On finishing the book, I asked it for a final message about itself. "A loud splash," it replied. I imagine Basho's "frog jumping into water." I imagine the Big Bang!

Max Cafard is a surrealist writer and pre-ancientist philosopher in New Orleans. He is the author of *The Surrealist Manifesto*, *FLOOD BOOK*, *Surrealist Explorations*, and *Lightning Storm Mind*.

## RESPIRATOR NOT INCLUDED: Monumental Mistakes

a serial postcard novel  
images: Sherry Millner  
texts: Ernest Larsen

### Chapter 7

#### DEVILS TOWER LEGEND

Devils Tower National Monument in Wyoming was established in 1906 by President Theodore Roosevelt and was the country's first national monument. It was one of the earliest landmarks in the region and was called *Matope Tepee*, meaning Grizzly Bear Lodge, by the Indians who had several legends about its origin.

The troop of well-armed threepers bumping & high-fiving in the half-empty parking lot spooked 4-year-old Janie. She piped up, "I'm staying in the car." Big brother Billy misquoted a prophet: "Be watchful: the Devil prowls around like a bellowing bear, seeking someone to devour." "Look," I said, "There's no Devil here & it's not a tower—it's a butte. The 'Indians' called it Bear Lodge." "There is too a Devil everywhere. Said so in Sunday school," she whined. Some threepers started their warmup, featuring synchronized grunting. "Why jeepers orepers threepers?" she rhymed. "They claim only 3% of colonists actually fought in our Revolutionary War. So they believe they only need that many to kickstart their own war." Now even more confused, Janie repeated, "I'm staying here." Tears flowed. Her nerves got jangled in Rook Springs when we made the mistake of reading a roadside plaque aloud. Did

she really need to hear about the 1885 Massacre: white miners lynching dozens of Chinese miners? And, worse yet, the dead crow pancaked near the plaque about IWW organizers being tarred & feathered in 1917? She pleaded wobbly, "We won't be tarred feathers, will we?" Now a full-on threeper cradling an AK47 was marching directly toward us. "Peel outa here," Billy said. "Bart, it's too late." I started the car. The threeper leaned in, reeking of engine oil. Janie moaned like a dying crow. "Folks," began Colonel Threeper, "the Tribes made a sweet-heart deal with the Feds so as to carry on their oookamamie rituals atop the butte, closing out climbers & you & me. For the love of Jesus, whose monument is this?" Billy murmured, "Even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light." Turned out the Colonel was running for election to the legislature. First order of business: making it a class-A felony to protest any Pipeline. His education program: teach your toddlers about Spiritual Warfare! Salvation dead ahead!



DEVILS TOWER LEGEND



In 1967, it was the Summer of Love in San Francisco. In Detroit, it was a

## Summer on Fire

**Summer on Fire: A Detroit Novel**

Peter Werbe

Black & Red 2021

### SUNFROG

**S**ummer on Fire, a debut novel from long time *Fifth Estate* staff member, Peter Werbe, takes place during seven weeks in 1967, the year I was born, during the months I lived in my radical mama's belly. So, I definitely need the narrator's front seat to those tumultuous times.

With this captivating, rollicking read, Werbe clears the pot-filled air of so many misunderstandings that a Gen X hippypunk like me, or later younger radicals could easily imbibe either the 1960s or the story of the *Fifth Estate*. Even though it is 1967, you are not

going to San Francisco with flowers in your hair.

In fact, any trite trips about the scene you may have entertained about the late '60s period are blown to bits by this badass book. Of course, you will see remnants of what your grandparents forgot to tell you. The sex and drugs are definitely there, although not too salacious or sensational. During my twenty years as an active member of the *Fifth Estate* collective beginning in 1989, only a handful of our frequent writers were regularly publishing books.

**W**hile I arrived too late for the works of Fredy Perlman as they came off the press of the Detroit Printing Co-op, I witnessed the processes leading to the publication of FE staffer David Watson's important texts such as *Beyond Bookchin* and *Against The Megamachine*.

But, I was still waiting for my friend Peter's first book. When I imagined his first effort, however, it was going to be a career-spanning collection of his essays, not a novel. But, his historical and incendiary fiction, that he insists is bigger than himself, is no less

a product of years of collaborations and relationships based around the *Fifth Estate* than his essays would have been.

The audacious, realistic tone of this tale avoids too much analysis and refuses any moralizing. Although violence is central to much of the plot and most of our learning in *Summer on Fire*, it is never amplified antagonistically nor condemned cathartically. We just see how the revolutionaries of that time both opposed an imperialist war and yet fought like hell for their own imaginations and integrity.

*Summer On Fire* doesn't so much fan the flames of urban rebellions like those reborn last summer across the U.S. and elsewhere following the brutal state murder of George Floyd, but it brings you close enough to the fire to warm your hands on the rage of the repressed and the rebellion of the oppressed.

All this is set inside the mental and emotional fire rendered hotter by the expanded consciousness and explosive life choices of the counterculture. Most readers will get a greater understanding of why we fight, what we are fighting against, and will leave the book with their inner fire kindled for more.



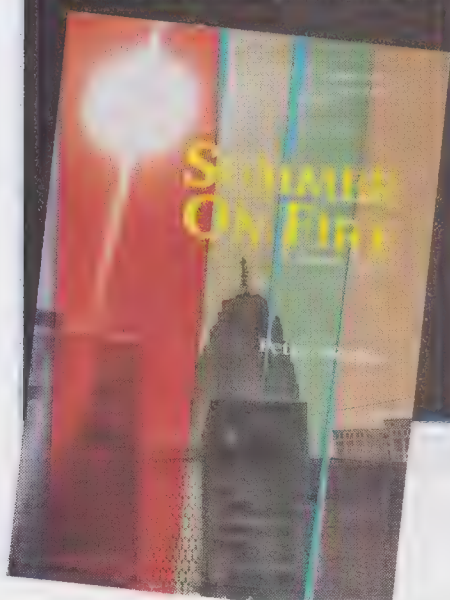
### Special Subscription Offer

Four issues of the  
*Fifth Estate* & a copy of  
*Summer on Fire* - \$25

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If an overarching history of the *FE* is ever attempted by an anarchist scholar down-the-line, allow this interpretation of *Summer On Fire* to at least dabble in our origin story.

The roots are not in the philosophical debates about the fundamental alienation of life under capital or in our embrace of the liberating core in primal lifeways, as a robust alternative. The roots are not in long, boring, 8-hour consensus meetings where everything is discussed and nothing really decided. The roots are not even necessarily in the movement against the Vietnam War and the summer rebellions so vividly described in these pages.

**T**he roots of this revolutionary magazine are not in ideologies so much as in experiences, like taking LSD, riding motorcycles through the streets of the Motor City, dancing almost all night at the Grande Ballroom, and still getting up the next morning to resist the war which claimed so many lives in imperialism's invasion and destruction of Indochina.

But rather, we meet Paul and Michele, a married couple in their late 20s as the central characters, much older than many of their revolutionary comrades of the time, eating lots of vegetarian cuisine, loving and arguing and traveling, just living an unpretentious working-class life in Detroit's imploding industrial, concrete wasteland. Paul and Michele live this life with such revolutionary joy and psychedelic wonder that it will give most readers pause to question our own currently less-enchanted existence and plodding pandemic life of endless Zooms and spinning Netflix queues.

The raw details of this fictionalized take on that fabled summer of 1967 in Detroit go far beyond so much of what you thought you knew about the New Left and its radical possibilities of the time.

When I first got a pre-publication PDF to read in preparation for this review and to create a 60-song playlist/soundtrack that the author and I co-curated, I devoured the book over a few days, and was sad when it ended. I laughed, cried, and got warmed to my core with the flames of revolution. For the soundtrack and historical footnotes for the book, go to Peter's web site at [PeterWerbe.com](http://PeterWerbe.com).

Although anti-authoritarian resistance remains for us on many fronts today, as it did then, it's easy for aging radicals to get either complacent or discouraged. If you sometimes find yourself with me in that camp, *Summer On Fire* is just the injection you might need.

This beautiful book helped me rediscover and remember my Detroit roots and why these struggles are ongoing against the authoritarian mindset that our main characters defy with every fiber of who they are, with joyful, defiant, revolutionary, anarchist desire.

Sunfrog lives somewhere in middle "Tanasi," on the traditional land of the Cherokee and the Yuchi tribe, also used by Shawnee, Chickasaw, and Muscogee Creek people.



Hanoi

## A Red Country

**Ngu Thi Yen**

My country's red, long so I was told  
Victories, a star glows  
Flag crimson, glorious so  
Vanguard leads, the people follow.

Red in sight, we have traded lives  
Beat armies, lay siege to empires.  
Red in mind, we have triumphed fights  
Bathed rivals in blood and plight.

Why today I see but grey  
Of skyscrapers in fatal haze  
Of nostalgia from olden days  
Of people's groveling for a pay.

Red, they lie, whilst we sell and buy  
Whilst at sea our people die.  
Set vanguard on fire, compatriot mine  
So from black, a rainbow shall rise.

Ngu Thi Yen is a Vietnamese translator and writer working to make anarchist theory more accessible to Vietnamese speakers. He writes to illustrate "the state capitalist reality in Vietnam with a call to action to build a true libertarian society.

"There is a lack of anarchist voices from Vietnam due to state repression and inaccessibility to primary sources. The most prominent Vietnamese voices in both leftist and anarchist spaces are, alarmingly, pro-authoritarian and state-friendly.

"As fellow South East Asian anarchists, libertarian communists and principled workers, it is our duty to call out the Vietnamese state's for-profit, authoritarian capitalist nature and callous disregard for the workers' lives."





## George Orwell's haunting tale takes on new power in this graphic novel 1984 Still Knocking at Our Door

### 1984: The Graphic Novel

George Orwell, Adapted & illustrated by Fido Nesti  
HMH 2021

### SEAN ALAN CLEARY

**I**t might be that everyone has *something* to say about George Orwell's *1984*. It's not only a perennial favorite among curriculum builders in American high schools, but also a ubiquitous shortcut for political meaning.

Anytime there's a question of censorship, surveillance, or the political distortion of language, the persona of the book gets trotted out in the mass media, and it once again rises through the best-sellers list.

For this reason, it didn't come as a surprise that following a well-received graphic novel version of Orwell's *Animal Farm* by Brazilian artist ODYR last year, published by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt (now, HMH), the same publishing group is putting out *1984* this summer, adapted and illustrated by another Brazilian artist, Fido Nesti.

With visual representation in the form of the graphic novel, like with the director Michael Radford's 1984 classic film adaptation featuring John Hurt and Richard Burton, comes questions though. It's no secret that the book hinges on Orwell's ideas of sight both of surveillance, and of the violence and fear of what's seen in Room 101, an interpretation so common that it dominates 21st century covers of the text: the watching eye. But how do we understand this stress on the visual, paired and adapted from a novel?

Nesti keys in this idea right from the start to heighten the reader's sense of sight. The novel begins with two memorable panels, the first where we see Winston, the central character, from behind through the lens of a telescreen, staticky lines helpfully giving us the visual cue along with a circular lens surrounded by black.

The pairing of the first panel with the second, identical, but different panel in which we're then given a fuller, wider, perspective, makes it clear he has something to say about visual perspective. In the wider vision, we see the famous clock striking thirteen, we see a poster of Big Brother poking out from behind a wall, and we see a clearer picture of the decaying buildings that line the dusty street.

Although it's small, these first panels begin to pry open the gaps between the perspectives of illustration, text, and reader. Our gaze as readers might be the same as that of the Ministry of Love, the dreaded secret police. Or, we might see more.

**H**ere's what Nesti gets in his graphic novel version that will make it a good book to add to the many, many representations of the text over the years: we might not understand Winston as we should. Yes. We watch him. We will pull him apart and make him what we want, but Nesti recognizes in his illustrations that something is wrong in our assessment of Winston as a martyr for freedom against the tyrannies of authoritarian regimes of all sorts, as the book is often taught.

The rub comes in a section of the book that took center stage in the 2013 play, *1984*, by Duncan MacMillan and



Robert Icke. The playwrights frame the action around a book group reading the text, and set in a world beyond 1984, but inside the reality of 1984.

This can only happen if we take the Appendix of the original novel at its word when it tells us, rather coyly, that “NEWSPEAK was the language of Oceania.” MacMillan and Icke make it clear that this means, as many alert readers have surmised, that in the end, Big Brother and the Party will not prevail, that there’s *something* that stops them.

Because the reader is pointed to the Appendix early on in a footnote, the only one in Orwell’s original text, we have to assume the author wanted this tease to give us a hope for the otherwise hopeless Winston Smith. But Winston fails. And the question becomes, if Winston fails, who succeeds? And why *does* Winston fail?

Here’s where it might be helpful to understand the larger world of Orwell. In his *Road to Wigan Pier*, part travelogue, part critical send-up of the middling cranks that dominated and, he thought, failed leftist movements in Britain, Orwell leans again and again into his obsession with how class distorts perception. No matter what, he says, the middle class, which he knew he could not escape, would never be able to understand the working class.

For him, it was the “lingering smell” that did it. It was a bridge too far, he admitted. Even after years as a tramp, living among the “down and out” life, he still acknowledged that his own understanding of the world could not be divorced from who he was.

**T**his is instructive in understanding Winston’s failure. It wasn’t that Winston didn’t know where the revolution that toppled Big Brother and the Party would come from. He says it over and over again in the novel. “Hope is in the Proles.” But instead, there’s something in Winston as a Party Member, as a generator of words, as part of the — to borrow a more contemporary term — “creatives” that prevents him from “seeing” the Proles as they are.

Nesti helps us along here. In the sections where Winston encounters the Proles, Nesti uses the distance between the representation of the text and his illustrations to help us understand Winston’s shortcoming. When Winston walks through the bustling Prole quarter of London around St. Pancras Station, the text begins with the vague reminder from Winston that “there’s hope in the proles.” But in that section, all we hear about is depravity and destruction. A bomb nearly kills Winston, and when he sees the severed hand of a victim of that bomb, he kicks it in disgust. It’s one of those heavy-handed symbols that the book is known for. Winston thinks there is hope in the proles, but sees none, only destruction. But Nesti, as an illustrator, knows better.

In a panel showing a wide shot of a prole street, the text trots out Winston’s image of the scene’s depravity with “ragged barefoot children” and girls with “crudely lipsticked

The revolution to come is not about some secretive Brotherhood, but instead by the prole communities already living lives in the gaps left by the government.

mouths” and “swollen waddling women.” Nesti’s illustration of this moment is set in contrast, with his proles pictured almost universally in actions of community, love even.

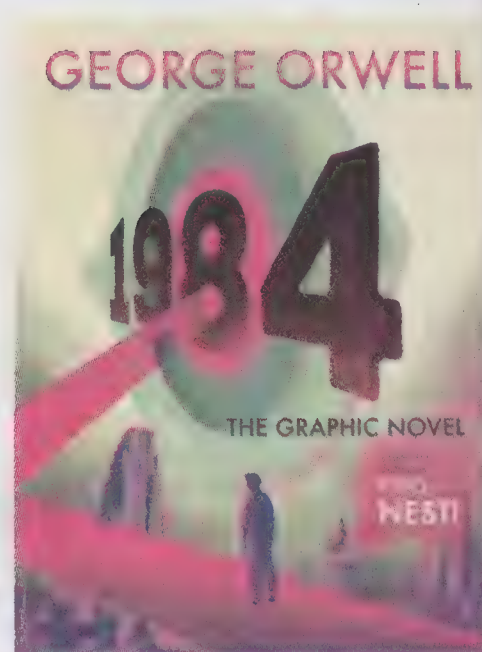
A woman puts her hand on the shoulder of her son, children (with shoes on!) play in the street. An older lady, large, but not waddling is led by a child. Men carry barrels on their shoulders, and smile in something like satisfaction.

**W**hat we see, very clearly, is Winston not getting it. In case it wasn’t clear, Winston, on the subsequent page, is saved by the warnings of a prole before a bomb shatters another street. It’s a warning Winston attributes to some animal instinct that proles must have when it comes to the bombs.

What Nesti visualizes, and the original text hints at, is that Winston’s class blindness, and inability to see the proles as anything but animalistic hordes, keeps him from seeing that the revolution to come is not about some secretive Brotherhood run by intelligent, subversive inner party members, but instead by the prole communities already living lives in the gaps left by the government.

That Orwell should have this idea embedded in the 1984 isn’t so strange, especially considering his experience in Barcelona during the Spanish Civil War and Revolution (1936-1939) led by workers in decentralized, collectivized factories, farms, and cafes. But we do see, with Nesti’s new version of 1984, another well done interpretation of the questions of perspective and the visual within the novel, where Nesti helps us expand on the question—what can Winston see—to better understand that sometimes we cannot see the answer right in front of us.

Sean Alan Cleary is a writer and teacher from Cambridge, Massachusetts. His work has been in *Public Books*, *Contingent Magazine*, and *Barrelhouse Reviews*.





# A Sacco and Vanzetti Mystery with a Modern Twist

**Suosso's Lane**

Robert Knox

Web-e-Pub 2016 [web-e-books.com/suosso/paperback.html](http://web-e-books.com/suosso/paperback.html)

## S. LAPLAGE

**D**uring the Red Scare following World War I, Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti were the perfect candidates for judicial murder. Italian, immigrants, and anarchists.

They were convicted in 1921 of murdering a paymaster and a guard during an armed robbery at the Slater and Morrill Shoe Company in Braintree, Massachusetts. Although their innocence became increasingly evident, they were executed in the electric chair in 1928. Mass demonstrations protesting the trial and the verdict took place across North America and the world.

My head was spinning after finishing this powerfully written novel. The quality of the prose is impressive. Author Robert Knox, a novelist and poet, who covers the arts for *The Boston Globe*, seems like an unlikely candidate to write a novel so sympathetic to his anarchist characters, but he brings them to life in marvelous fashion.

The story easily goes back and forth between the early years of the 20th century, the trial and death of Sacco and Vanzetti, a cop killed in the 1940s, and the present, following different people connected to the victims of the State and of anti-immigrant and anti-anarchist campaigns.

This is literature, not a history course. We vividly encounter the horrible working and living conditions people endured, the activities of an-



The IWW paper calls for a general strike to save the condemned anarchists in 1927. Neither the strike nor the effort was successful.

archists, some well-known, who act in reaction to their oppression and imprisonment and deportation of their comrades, the Palmer raids, and the Red Scare.

The characters are well-developed. Some very human, with doubts and faults, including men and women from different social classes who defend

Sacco and Vanzetti, and the descendants of the two anarchists who appear as part of a developing mystery.

Others are inhuman. From foremen who treat workers as beasts of burden, police who attack strikers, to the judge, prosecuting attorney, and Massachusetts governor who condemn the innocent anarchists to death.

But the story doesn't remain in the past. Leading up to the near-present, the author weaves in the question of greed (a foundation of capitalism), an unsolved murder in the 1940s (who killed the cop and why?), and a much sought-after letter relating to the trial of Sacco and Vanzetti.

A reporter for a regional paper, a history professor, a social worker, the owner of a resale shop seeking fame, and a greedy restaurant proprietor willing to do anything, are fluidly integrated into the story. They all want the letter. To what lengths will they go to find it?

Don't let the novel's 570 pages scare you. By the end, you may be wishing it were longer.

S. Laplage is a member of the Fifth Estate editorial collective. They live in Montreal.



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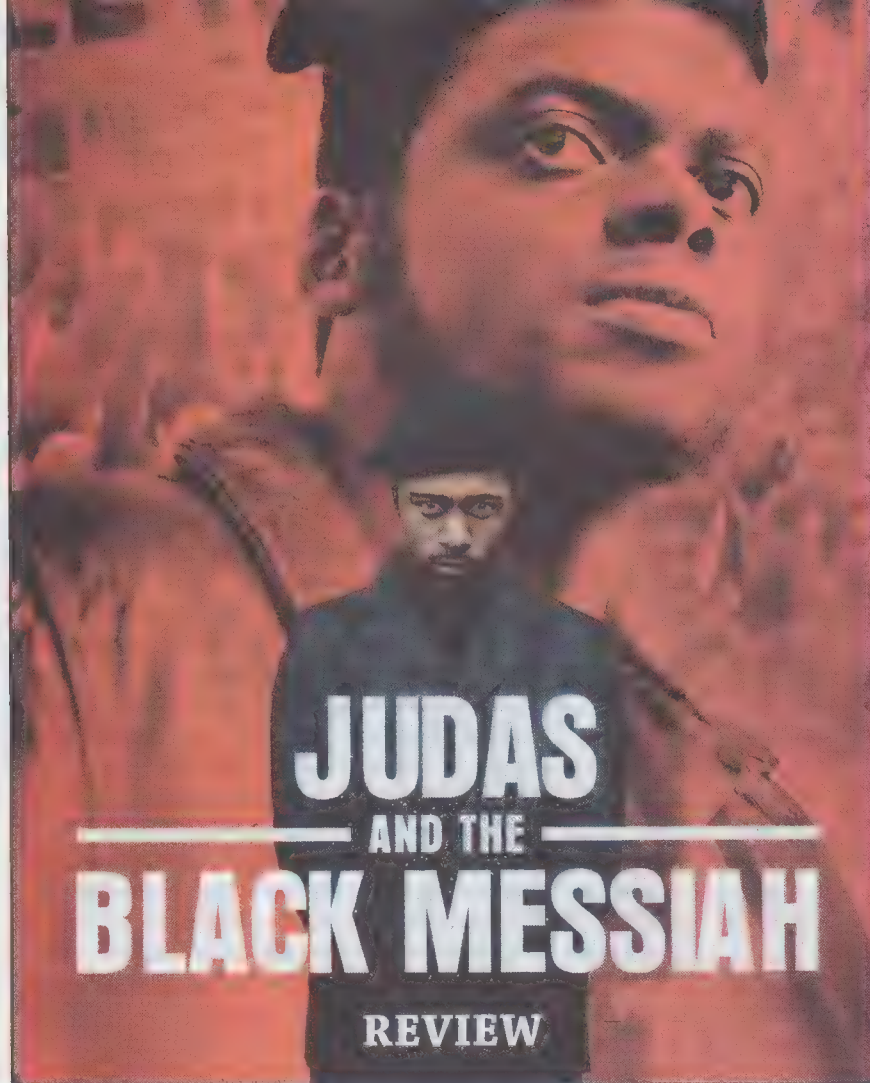
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## Death Squad: Thy Name is FBI

### Judas and the Black Messiah

Director: Shaka King

2hr 6m (2021)

"You can kill a revolutionary, but you can't kill a revolution."

—Fred Hampton, 1969

But what if killing a revolutionary does kill a revolution?

—Curious Film Critic

### WILLIAM R. BOYER

Until recently, few high school social studies classes, let alone the general adult population, ever stumbled upon COINTELPRO, state terrorism, or Fred Hampton, the last of four prominent African American leaders assassinated during the 1960s, after Medgar Evers, Malcolm X and Martin Luther King. As the mainstream seems even less aware of our essential protest past, perhaps Hollywood has oddly begun to fill a disturbing void.

Thanks to an unlikely commercial feature film rendering of one of the most brutal incidents of the civil rights movement, a remarkable, if flawed, cinematic entry point now covers some grossly neglected US history: the orchestrated FBI and Chicago police assassination of Hampton, the 21-year-old Illinois Black

Panther Party Chairman, and fellow BBP activist Mark Clark, in a pre-dawn December 4, 1969 ambush at Hampton's apartment.

It's astonishing that four unknown African American scriptwriters and one fairly well-connected director-producer, Ryan Coogler, of well-deserved *Fruitvale Station* fame (a 2013 indirect inspiration for Black Lives Matter) found \$26 million to pull off such an ambitious, well-acted project. Surely, the BLM resurgence in the summer of 2020 helped its timely distribution.

Despite the questionable concession of making the main character Judas, the slimy FBI informant, William O'Neal, over the powerful Hampton, the film generally avoids sanitizing or sensationalizing the doomed collision between dedicated Black revolutionaries and the most powerful police state apparatus in the world.

This quasi bio-pic rather brazenly exposes the FBI's infamous Counter Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO). While extensive government surveillance of radicals, and harassment operations date back to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, by 1969, the FBI director (of state violence), J. Edgar Hoover, intensified his ruthless crusade to "neutralize" those he perceived as Public Enemy #1 after Martin Luther King's assassination.

His primary target pivoted from mostly pacifist civil rights activists to the militant and armed Black Panther Party for Self-Defense (BPP) and to stop any potential new "Black Messiah" from arising, the racist Hoover's greatest fear.

Originating in Oakland, California in 1966 with co-founders Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale, the Marxist and Malcolm X-influenced Black liberation, the BPP had been growing by hundreds of semi-autonomous chapters across the country, most notably with the gifted Hampton in Chicago. A mostly modest Ten-Point Program touted a seemingly achievable revolution free of brutal cops, foreign wars and white hegemony.

By early 1969, most of the Panther



## Hampton gained freedom on appeal, so the FBI went to the CIA Vietnam playbook of terminating with extreme prejudice



leadership had been jailed on serious felony charges including two separate murder trials for the Panther chairmen, and H. Rap Brown for inciting an armed riot across state lines, or fugitives in exile (Eldridge and Kathleen Cleaver in Algeria).

As the film dramatically shows, Hampton's unusual organizing and oratory skills drew the feds ire. He dared to begin mobilizing other disparate groups as a prototype Rainbow Coalition, such as the large Blackstone Rangers street gang, the Chicano-based Brown Berets, and for the first time in Panther organizing, many white activists, including Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). The Chicago chapter even took great pride in its highly effective free breakfast program for area children.

You can jail a revolutionary, but what if he gets out on appeal?

In 1968, Hampton was convicted on a trumped-up robbery charge for allegedly leading the hijacking of an ice cream truck and distributing the treat to area children. He gained freedom on appeal, so the FBI went to the CIA Vietnam playbook of terminating with extreme prejudice. O'Neal, played effectively by LaKeith Lee Stanfield, as the wounded petty criminal deer-in-the-headlights, became the perfect traitor to the cause, even befriendng his white FBI boss in a queasy paternalistic relationship.

As head of Chicago Panther security, O'Neal gave the FBI detailed floor plans of both the Panther headquarters and Hampton's apartment. The feds also provided him with the guns and ammo the FBI would later use as its excuse for the fatal search warrant raid. The film includes O'Neal's final treacherous act of slipping tranquilizers into Hampton's drink several hours before the execution at point blank

range, amidst a wail of one-way gunfire and desperate attempts to wake Hampton by his pregnant fiancé Deborah Johnson (Dominique Fishback).

Daniel Kuluuya portrays Hampton's confident leadership quite precisely, down to his convincing voice and speech patterns, although the lead actors are noticeably 10 years older in real life—too big a gamble to risk such difficult roles for any inexperienced young 20s thespian.

Unlike Hollywood's previous attempt, *Panther*, (1995), a cartoonish faux-history centering around real and fictional characters, few punches are pulled in retelling the top-down ruthlessness of Hoover's war on these urban activists. The FBI director of 37 years typically directed Presidents from FDR to Nixon to shut up and let him do his (dirty) business without even token supervision.

*Judas and the Black Messiah* remains about a half hour too short on Hampton's meteoric rise in the months before his murder, as the narration omits his elevated momentum after visiting the Panther national headquarters in Oakland. We see moments of touching romance within perhaps a too romantic movement.

Hampton spoke out eloquently against self-defeating "Custerism," citing the failed Weatherman faction of SDS's Days of Rage in Chicago two months before his death, yet he seemed at least dimly aware of the forces arming steadily against him.

The subsequent fall of the BPP rapidly accelerated after the murder of Hampton and Clark.

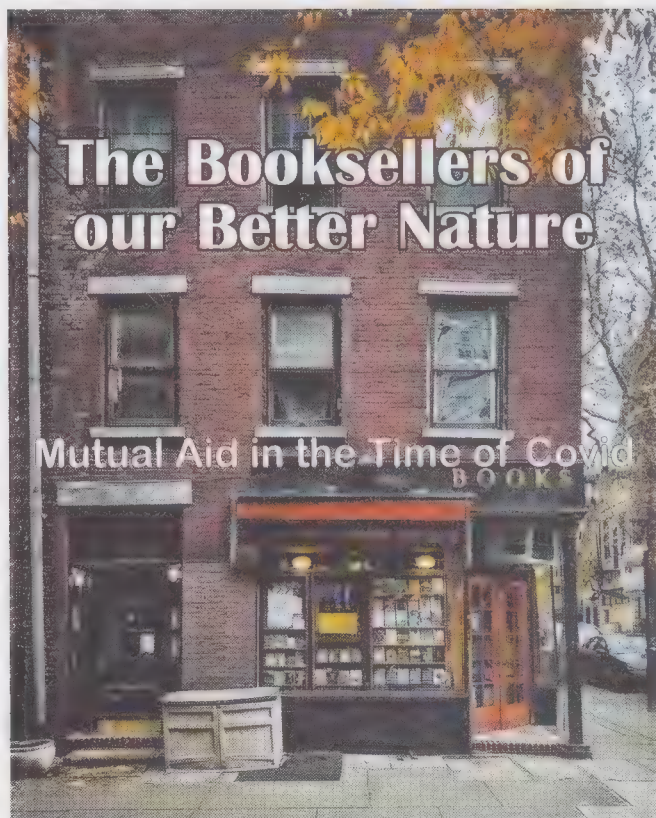
Maybe a revolution can be renewed, yet all evidence points to how it can be stopped for generations by killing some key activists, and the recruitment of inept politicians, such as former Chicago Black Panther Bobby Rush, now a born-again city council member. With the state ever in control, will it look away as Hollywood tries to explore other overlooked conquests by American state terrorism?

William R. Boyer continues to teach high school social studies, just north of Detroit, from an undisclosed screen.





## How solidarity helped save independent bookstores in New York City



### CARRIE LABEN

New York City. March 2020, the first days of the crisis that would define the year. The words “mutual aid” began to appear where they’d not been seen before, from lamp post flyers to Reddit neighborhood forums.

Everyone from New York Governor Andrew Cuomo to Britney Spears was using the expression. Loosely organized groups ran errands and made deliveries. Friends sewed masks for friends, then for friends of friends. And well before the summer’s boiling-over of righteous rage at police brutality, sustained protests attempted to hold Cuomo and the prison system accountable for leaving incarcerated at-risk people in facilities like Rikers Island, which became a hotspot for COVID.

Some of these efforts were organized by radical groups, others emerged organically like an ecosystem. Those with different skills and circumstances found their niches. People, for the most part, didn’t want to wait in isolation like princesses in towers. They wanted to help.

Around this same city, a local news site, *Gothamist*, reported multiple incidents of police tasked with enforcing physical distancing congregating and making arrests without masks, Cuomo stood firm on the prisoners and exploited prison labor to produce hand sanitizer. The rich fled to the

Hudson Valley, the Hamptons, and the Poconos in unwitting re-enactments of Edgar Allan Poe’s *The Masque of the Red Death*, which couldn’t help but contribute to the politicization of the crisis by an alienated segment of society on the hunt for conspiracy theories.

In New York City, as everywhere, grassroots efforts and government action overlapped and obscured each other in such a way that it may never be fully possible to tease out what worked, what might have worked, and what could never have worked. Despite this, the initial impulse to share and help, to reach out, suggests that there is a core of readiness, of flexible individual responses to crisis and of underlying resilience in the community, not based on top-down direction, but rests in the heart of humanity, ready to go.

One small story of solidarity and community organizing comes from New York bookseller Jeff Waxman. When bookstores closed their doors this spring to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and hundreds of booksellers were laid off, funds were raised to be distributed by the Book Industry Charitable Foundation, cheerily donated by the same publishers who keep booksellers living and working in precarity the rest of the year. Many bookstores launched crowdfunding campaigns, with varying degrees of success. The federal government’s Payroll Protection Program funds brought some bookselling people back from furlough. But most stayed unemployed.

Two days after NYC closed nonessential businesses, Waxman was part of a group of booksellers who formed The Bookstore at the End of the World, a collectively organized online bookstore using the newly-launched bookshop.org. There was an immediate outpouring of support that put between \$500 and \$850 into the pockets of forty-seven booksellers from a dozen shops across the country, but the surge of support was short-lived. Over the next two months, sales dwindled and bookstores remained closed. Booksellers, like many others, had to start coming up with new ways of living. There was a growing appeal in the worker-run cooperative model.

Waxman says that removing daily employment with its long commutes, distractions, and professional obligations, opened his eyes to what was happening closer to his home in Jackson Heights, a diverse community in Queens. There were the colossal and growing needs of undocumented people, a large part of the community, most of whom could not obtain unemployment compensation or social services.

Waxman and his partner, Katherine McLeod, met on



stoops and street corners with other organizers to hash out the particulars of a project to sell books on 34th Avenue; a beneficiary of the Open Streets program that barred car traffic from stretches of road in every borough and opened them up for socially-distanced recreation. New York City, despite being highly regulated, does not require a license for booksellers on the street. So, the group laid out used books gathered from their own shelves one Sunday morning and waited.

This was the birth of Open Borders Books, a bookselling collective with two ideas at the center: everyone should be able to afford books and so-called nonessential workers like booksellers had something essential to offer the community.

The collective sold the books on a pay-what-you-like basis, dedicating half of all sales to local aid organizations. In Jackson Heights, "We have a progressive local political scene and strong workers' rights groups, so there was no question about finding recipients for these funds," says Waxman. "They were all around us, doing work we could see to improve the lives of our neighbors."

In the first month, operating for four hours every Sunday, they were able to contribute \$657 to Make the Road, an organization offering legal and material aid to undocumented people. In August, \$992 went to New Immigrant Community Empowerment. In September, they sent \$1000 to the

Jackson Heights Community Fridge. "Used books started to flow toward us from friends and well-wishers from all over the neighborhood," says Waxman, "then all over the city."

With winter looming, the project transitioned to offering mail order and browsing space in a garage, as well as uniting with other mutual aid projects to share resources and information.

According to Waxman, "Open Borders Books is a growing and active collective and the members will determine where it goes from here, but the pay-what-you-can model will always be a part of its DNA. We're here to provide access, first and foremost.

"Books have a physical longevity that give them many lives and many readers," says Waxman. "Helping them from one shelf to another severs them slowly from the dirty business that first transformed them from art to commodity, and makes them into a something that can inform or entertain, fill a belly, change a mind, or line a bookshelf. . . [F]inding ways to take these things back and bend them into tools that serve whole communities, on and off the page, is the job at hand."

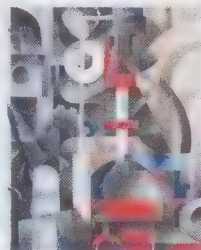
Carrie Laben is the author of the novel, *A Hawk in the Woods*, and the forthcoming novella, *The Water Is Wide*. They live in Queens, where they are at work on their next novel.

## Art in the Fifth Estate

Images that appear in our pages are separate statements on the subject addressed in an article.



P. 29 Lars van Dooren is a Brooklyn-based artist. He is a 2020 Frederieke Sanders-Taylor StudioProjects Fund grant recipient. [arsvandooen.com](http://arsvandooen.com).



P.43 Patrick Dengate makes art and wooden boats in Ferndale, Michigan. He is involved in community volunteering, public service, and environmental activism. [www.patrickdengate.com](http://www.patrickdengate.com).



P.32 Jim Chatelain Lives and works in Metro Detroit and upstate New York. He is currently in the "Dual Vision" show at the Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit (MOCAD). [www.jimchatelain.com](http://www.jimchatelain.com)



P. 20 Carla Repice's work investigates systems of oppression and memory, and probes the effects of racism and dehumanization on the human psyche.

She has an MFA in performance art, and studied painting and feminist theory at The Lorenzo de Medici School of Art in Florence, Italy. She lives in New York City.

**The Fifth Estate welcomes submissions of art and photographs to accompany our essays. Best way is to send high-res jpeg images. We can't print everything we receive, but we will give your work respectful consideration.**

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P.42 Jacques Tardi. Detail of a panel from his graphic novel, *Cri du Peuple* (Cry of the People) telling the story of the 1871 Paris Commune.



**D**iane di Prima has died. Now we have no choice but to introduce her to each other, since she is no longer here to introduce herself.

On paper, you could say, “she was a poet, she was a feminist, beatnik, anarchist, Buddhist.” You could list her famous friends and lovers. Promote her books, her poems, her art. But she was so many things.

Beat goddess-child, mother, full of wonder, woman’s insight, wolf-woman, shelterer of fellow queers, full of joy, love-seeker, runaway, homemaker, follower of the muses and artist-muse.

She sang her life to us in poems, in the creative fiction *Memoirs of a Beatnik*, in the infinitely layered memoir-treasure *Recollections of My Life as a Woman*. She was sacred, profane, careless, caring, loved. She and her cycle of artists and other bringers of life lived in an in-between, creating their own world, messing up, showing it. She prayed differently than her Catholic grandmother and saw further into the dark than her atheist grandfather. She held her anarchist ancestors, blood or otherwise, close, clinging fiercely to independence, believing in the possibility of new worlds in our hearts. She offered us her pain and her joy, her wisdom, and her hunger for knowledge.

She was a romantic cynic, patient crone before her time. In place of the things, she refused (nine-to-five, respectability, heteronorms, nothingness) she planted something richer, more generative. She strove for a life that was an offering, willingly sacrificed to art, in exchange for a place among other misfits, faces turned towards the sun, awaiting instruction, inspiration, something. She saw her children come into being, her lovers and friends come and go, and her writing travel through different forms, from playful Beat experiments like the poem “No Problem Party Poem” to the dense spiritual



## Diane di Prima (1934-2020) Beat Poet & Activist

MARIEKE BIVAR

the stilted lives of their parents with them. And create monuments, of which this is one, not just to Diane, but to the wide-open arms of struggle against the status quo, to our family of Beats and Black revolutionaries and queer freedom fighters and anarchists. That is what Diane di Prima did. She wrote a love letter for us, *Revolutionary Letters* to us, created monuments of stanzas to help us remember our past, our present, our shared purpose.

Whether she was gently lambasting a poet in residence, recounting a wild party, remembering her life growing up in Brooklyn in the 1940s, or regaling us with tales of dropping acid with the man-Beats, Diane knew best how to tell her

introspection of *Loba*. What she did with her life was not heroic or singular, but she did leave a map, a record of her wanderings that, although not promising to lead us anywhere or take us to the same places she inhabited, is a magical legacy, and a gift.

Trying to memorialize her is a painful exercise in mourning, a slog through the knowledge that there is no way to sum up her contributions, convey her worth, the pain of her loss. But she left so much of herself behind that there is no need.

You can meet her in her work, know her deeply or fleetingly. Read her books about wild Beats and dream back to that world of discovery and adventure, reject

life story. This is not a biography or an obituary.

This is a love-letter monument to a sister I only met through books.

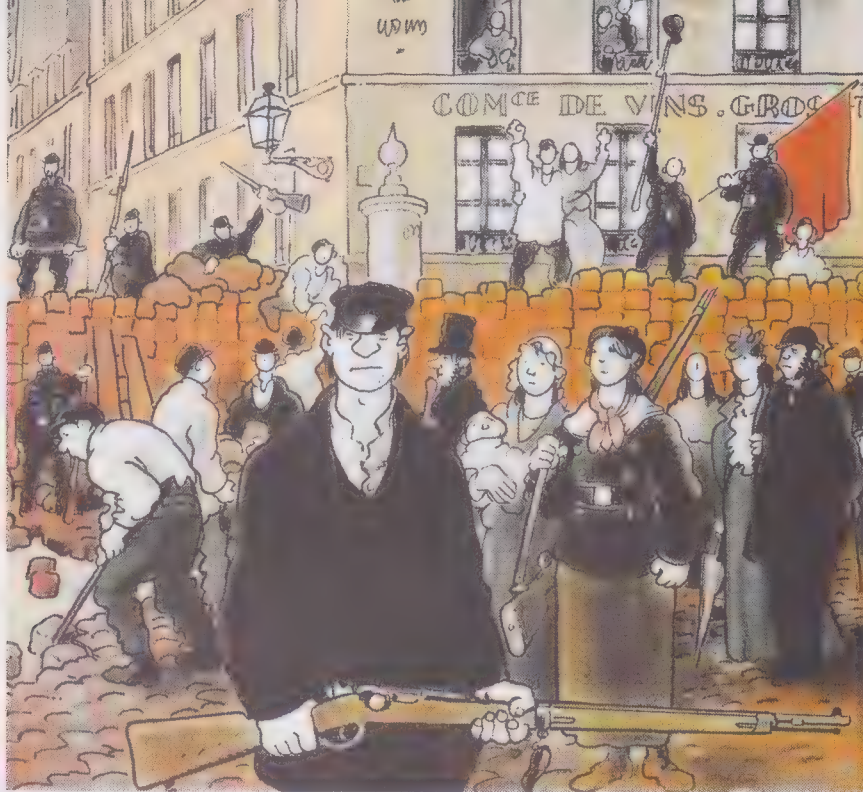
Now, you are introduced. May you love her as much as she loved you.

Marieke Bivar is in Montreal, avoiding the plague like, well, the plague. She has been writing, translating and hatching get rich quick schemes that exclude having or being a boss while shouting “free them all” at the prison guards, and “Black lives matter” into the white void.

### REVOLUTIONARY LETTER #29

beware of those  
who say we are the beautiful losers  
who stand in their long hair and wait to be punished  
who weep on beaches for our isolation  
we are not alone : we have brother in all the hills  
we have sisters in the jungles and in the ozarks  
we even have brothers on the frozen tundra  
they sit by their fires. they sing, they gather arms  
they multiply : they will reclaim the earth  
nowhere we can go but they are waiting for us  
no exile where we will not hear welcome home  
good morning brother, let me work with you  
goodmorning sister, let me  
fight by your side





—from *Le Cri du Peuple* by Jacques Tardi

The People Ruled the City for Three Short Months

## The Paris Commune, The Right To Be Lazy & Surrealism

PENELOPE ROSEMONT

*"Work, now? Never, never. I'm on strike."* —Rimbaud

**T**his year marks the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Paris Commune, an experiment in self-governance that is still inspiring today. It was born in response to the suffering caused by the Franco-Prussian War and the betrayals of the French central government.

Napoleon III's Second Empire declared war on Prussia on July 19, 1870. The French troops were summarily routed by the Prussian military and surrendered on September 2. On the 4th, outraged and rebellious Parisians declared the end of the regime and announced a republic with a provisional government. The Prussian troops cut Paris off from the rest of the country and a brutal siege of the city began.

The Prussian monarchy used the war to consolidate its dominance over several other Germanic principalities and formed a centralized nation-state.

In February 1871, a peace treaty was signed between the French Provisional Government and the new German State, but the rebels of Paris refused to surrender. Some of the battalions of the National Guard, the organized militia created by the Republic to protect Paris, formed their own Central Committee with elected commanders to continue protecting the city.

On March 18, to fulfill their peace agreement with the new German state, the French government sent troops into Paris to remove artillery located there. They were confronted by a crowd of women who refused to give up the cannons stationed on Montmartre, a hill overlooking the city.

Among the women was Louise Michel (1830-1905), a poor school teacher with egalitarian hopes and desires. In the days that followed, Michel participated in organizing women to fight for the Commune on the barricades and against discrimination inside the Commune. In later years, she became a well-known anarchist.

That day in Montmartre, the women talked with the troops and brought them food and drink. They convinced the soldiers to leave the cannons where they were. Their officers ordered them to fire on the crowd, but the troops refused and turned their guns on their officers. Two generals were killed.

Radical Parisians went on to declare the Commune on March 28. A network of neighborhood popular clubs were established. Citywide elections created a council which proclaimed Paris autonomous and asserted the desire to recreate France as a confederation of self-governing communes.

The communards also established self-managed workers' associations and cooperatives. By May, 43 Parisian workplaces were cooperatively run and the Louvre Museum was converted into a munitions factory run by a workers' council to provide for the defense of the city.

Although anarchists were not in the majority in the Commune, many played influential roles, including the Reclus brothers, Eugène Varlin, and Gustav Courbet.

The Paris Commune was the first major French event to be photographed. Bruno Braquehais (1823-1875) published a book in Paris during that time containing over 100 photos of life in the city during the period. Michael Löwy's recent book, *Revolutions*, features many of these very moving photographs. Unfortunately, Braquehais's book was used later by the French government to track



down Commune participants.

The events in Paris in 1871 were preceded by several anarchist inspired endeavors and inherited the dreams of earlier utopians. The goal of worker self-governance in the city was anticipated by short-lived uprisings in Lyon and Marseilles in 1870. Both were strongly influenced by the ideas of anarchists, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and Mikhail Bakunin.

The communards were inspired by earlier utopian thinkers who were considering the effects of the industrial revolution, the scientific revolution, and the consequent need for a new organization of society. They were influenced by such thinkers as Proudhon (1809-1865), the first person to call himself an anarchist in his book *What is Property*; Saint Simon (1760-1825) who had an optimistic view of science and technology, and Victor Considerant (1808-1893), who wrote a *Manifesto of Democracy*. Proudhon and Saint-Simon were influenced by an earlier utopian, Charles Fourier (1772-1837).

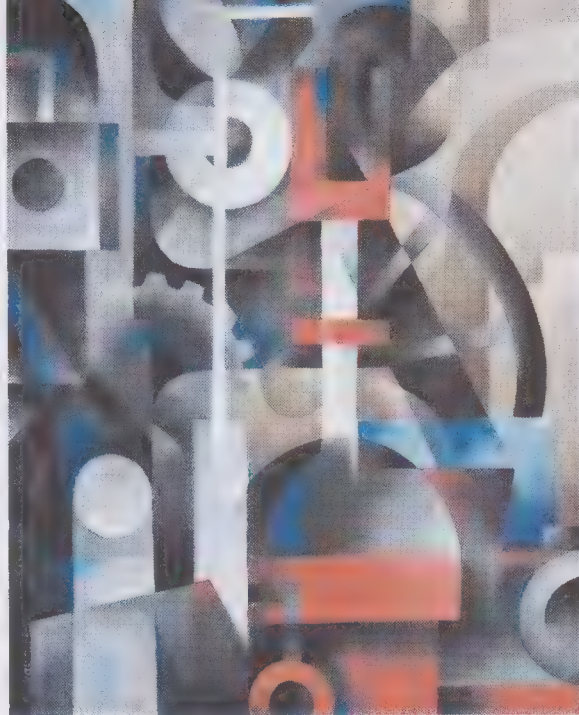
Fourier considered the organization of work in the modern world as both exploitative and alienating. He advocated planned communities, not too big or too small of about 1,500 persons. He pointed out that one could judge the progress of a civilization from the degree of freedom women enjoyed, and coined the word feminism.

He especially emphasized that people must be free to follow their passions, asserting that this can transform work into play. Fourier did not bother to deal with the problem of the Industrial Revolution directly because he considered it a passing phase in the history of humanity.

The Commune was crushed at the end of May 1871 when the French central government launched an all-out military assault on Paris. The troops fought the insurgents street by street for a week. Known and suspected participants in the Commune were arrested and put on trial. Thousands were executed, others were imprisoned or exiled. Approximately 20,000 Communards were murdered by the state.

There was a huge diaspora of Communards fleeing France and settling in the United States, French-speaking Québec, Belgium, Britain, Spain, and Italy, where they often had a significant radicalizing influence on the nascent working-class organizations.

Those forced to leave France included Louise Michel, who was shipped to New Caledonia, the French penal colony in the Pacific. Camille Pissarro, an anarchist who rev-



olutionized French painting by scandalously portraying ordinary working people and landscapes, went to England. Victor Hugo moved to Belgium. Arthur Rimbaud left for England due to a sex scandal or perhaps more likely because he was photographed next to the fallen Vendôme Column, a symbol of Napoleonic tyranny under the First and Second French Empires, a monument to war and imperialism. The artist Gustav Courbet, who had played a big part in the attack on this symbol glorifying war, escaped to Switzerland.

Paul Lafargue (1842-1911) Karl Marx's son-in-law, narrowly escaped to Belgium where

he wrote *The Right to be Lazy*, challenging bourgeois ideas about the value of work. This piece was translated into English by Chicago's Charles H. Kerr and published by his company in 1907.

In the 1960s, Surrealists, IWW, and Solidarity Bookshop people in Chicago republished *The Right to be Lazy* in two editions. One had an introduction by Joseph Jablonski, and the other by Bernard Marszalek. There was also an important essay by the IWW's Fred Thompson giving the historical context of the Commune. There have been several editions since then, including most recently, one published by AK Press/Charles H. Kerr Publishing Co.

Surrealist ideas on the possible future of society have been influenced by the Paris Commune and the earlier utopians who inspired its participants. They have looked especially to Fourier. André Breton (1896-1966) wrote a long poem, *Ode to Charles Fourier*, in 1946.

In 1965, Breton joined with other Surrealists to organize an exhibition in France devoted to Fourier titled *L'Ecart Absolu* (absolute break). Around the same time, the Surrealists named their new journal *L'Archipel*, referencing Fourier's idea that human beings would develop more harmonious natures after 400 years of living in a utopia. (I was there in 1965 at the cafe in Paris when the group chose this name.)

Work is dead! Long live work! A secret connection exists between past generations and the present one. Our existence was determined on this earth by their work. Work has made us. Yet, it oppresses us and our heart's desire is to live without work. At the same time, we have been endowed with a pressing utopian desire, a passionate dream. Why not transform work itself? Work transformed—its motor: our desires.

Penelope Rosemont is the author of *Surrealism: Inside the Magnetic Fields* (City Lights). She lives in Chicago.





# The Human Life Exchange Rate Mechanism

Liberal Rights, Double Binds, the West, & the Rest

TOM SYKES

**I**n our neoliberal societies, elites like to quantify the worth of human lives in various ways. A telling example is per capita GDP (Gross Domestic Product) that determines the economic contribution each citizen makes to a nation.

Such a view gives succor to Social Darwinists and free-market right-wingers. If some lives are more valuable than others in this formulation then why should those of lower value be aided by the wider community? While few elite figures today would say things like this out loud, similar calculi tacitly inform many political decisions.

When Covid-19 first struck the UK and US, it revealed the devastation done to health and social services by years of privatization and austerity. Poor housing, inadequate financial support for those forced to isolate and other failings have made lockdown intolerable and even lethal for some, as suicide and domestic violence rates have soared. Yet not to lock down would endanger many others with health conditions.

**T**his Sophie's choice between two unpleasant outcomes would be avoidable in a fair society properly resourced to protect *all* its citizens. But in our decidedly unfair societies, the powerful must come down on one side or another.

In a comment that warrants respect for its honesty – if nothing else – the British ex-judge, Lord Sumption, recently claimed that the life of a woman with advanced cancer was “less valuable” than the lives of other, young and fit people with their futures ahead of them to whom lockdown is “punishing ... for the greater good.”

This callously reductionist mode of measuring humans against each other is an arguably more significant and destructive component of Western policies

and attitudes towards the non-Western world.

As with the domestic calculations mentioned above, what can be called the Human Life Exchange Rate Mechanism (HLERM), is also produced by inequality, but of a different stripe: between societies on the bases of wealth, development, and the hard (military and economic) and soft (diplomatic and cultural) power at their disposal.

The HLERM predates neoliberalism to at least the early modern period. What American writer Martin Green has called “the nationalist slogan” of that time prompted Shakespeare to have his character Henry V assert that “one Englishman was worth three Frenchmen” in the context of decades of bloodshed between the two countries.

According to the genocidal subjugator of the so-called New World, Christopher Columbus, foreigners unfortunate enough to hail from outside of Europe were worth even less next to Europeans, a logic necessitated by the desire to violently expropriate land and resources from the Americas.

“With a magnification suitable to the greater cultural gap,” writes Green of Columbus’ brutal worldview, “a thousand Indians would not stand before three Spaniards.”

**T**he ideological contradictions of Columbus’ time were not dissimilar from our own. In Renaissance Europe, the HLERM inflicted on allegedly inferior bodies in the colonially oppressed parts of the globe jarred with new humanist ideas about the rights of all men (though not yet anyone else) to freedom, safety and legal protection.

Today, what Australian social theorist M.G.E. Kelly calls the “differential valuation of life” covert in Western globalization and imperialism is incompatible with the rhetoric of diversity, equality and social justice now often embraced by the very institutions culpable for Western abuses of the rest, from the military-industrial complex to the state-corporate media.



If large, authoritarian institutions—**governments, militaries, corporations**—were **dismantled** along with the unjust **capitalist relations** they service, then **power** could be **devolved** to autonomous **collectives of ordinary people**.

Aside from this chasm between what is opportunistically said and what is sincerely believed, French philosopher Alain Badiou states that Western human rights discourse, which supposedly applies to every human without prejudice, depends paradoxically on casting non-Westerners as not yet eligible for human rights.

This is due to the assumption that “the misery of the Third World is the result of its own incompetence, its own inanity – in short, of its *subhumanity*.” This highly selective vision of rights is, Badiou argues, the construct of a neoliberal order that frequently resorts to military adventurism (of which Columbus was a pioneer) in “uncivilized” regions to secure its objectives.

**T**he philosophy of neo-pragmatist philosopher Richard Rorty can be seen as an attempt to square the circle of a human rights framework that does not extend to all humanity. Rorty asserts that we tend to privilege the welfare of those other people who belong to our own cultures, nations and communities rather than because “they are our fellow human beings.”

It is understandable to a point if we care more about our relatives, friends and compatriots than about humans on the other side of the world whom we’ve never met. But then how do we form solidarities with those distant others across national, ethnic or other boundaries in order to address problems on a global scale: war, poverty, the climate emergency, and other international problems?

The contemporary HLERM, then, is what we are left with when liberal moral principles intended to be universal clash with the grim realities of liberal capitalism’s conduct on the world stage. In this manner, the HLERM compromises not only reactionaries like Lord Sumption, but certain leftists who are trying to better the world in good faith.

In his recent book, *The New Age of Empire*, the race studies scholar Kehinde Andrews has interrogated a range of current progressive causes that would benefit working people in the West while punishing and exploiting working people outside of the region.

For instance, the so-called “fourth industrial revolution” plans to harness green and digital technologies to democratize Western economies and redistribute wealth within them.

The problem, as Andrews sees it, is that the program’s left-leaning

exponents do not acknowledge that the resources (human and natural) needed to drive this new, supposedly more ethical form of capitalism, would have to be extracted from the poorest regions of Asia, Africa and Latin America.

**O**n a slightly different but related tack, we have the contradiction of wokewashing in which Western corporations, public bodies, government agencies and universities say they are decolonizing their practices and making commitments to fighting racism and sexism within the workplace.

But, at the same time, they simultaneously enjoy lucrative financial relationships with the armaments and fossil fuel industries which are complicit in the destruction of the lives and environments of many people of color inhabiting the post-colonial world, a disproportionate number of whom are women.

However well-meaning these projects are, implicit in them is a judgement about the relative welfare and opportunities of those who reside in wealthy countries, and those who do not.

That the HLERM so often leads to having to make agonizing Sophie’s choices raises two enormous questions.

(1) What sort of a degraded, unequal world have elites made that limits us so?

(2) What should be changed?

If large, authoritarian institutions – governments, militaries, corporations – were dismantled along with the unjust capitalist relations they service, then power could be devolved to autonomous collectives of ordinary people wherever they are in the world, and the pitfalls and double binds of the HLERM would become redundant.

Tom Sykes is the author of *Imagining Manila: Literature, Empire and Orientalism*, published by Bloomsbury. He lives and works in Portsmouth, UK.



## Touch a Piece of Anarchist History Emma Goldman's “Mother Earth”

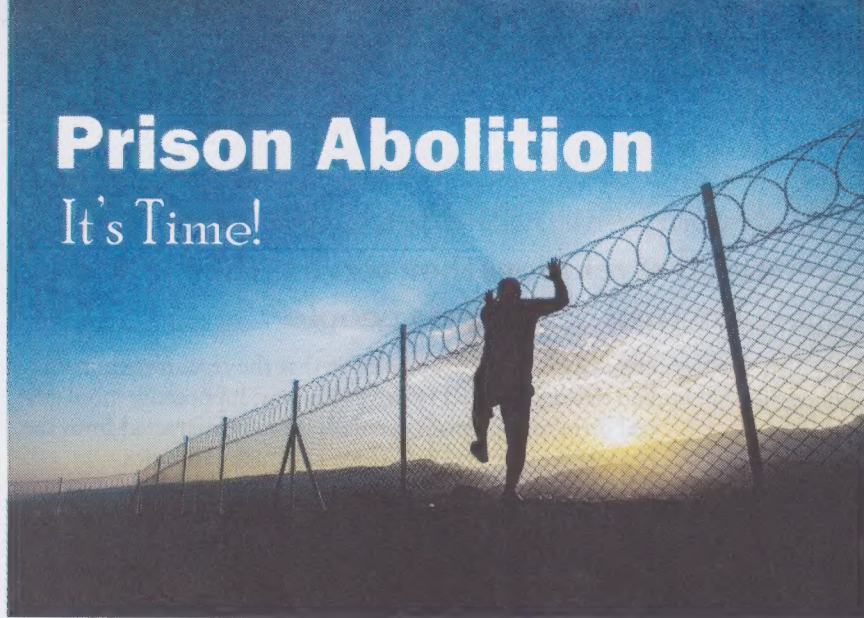
Emma Goldman published this journal between 1906-1917 until suppressed by the U.S. government for opposing World War I & the draft.

We have five copies published between 1913-15 to offer at \$50 each. Contact us at [fe@fifthestate.org](mailto:fe@fifthestate.org) to check availability.



# Prison Abolition

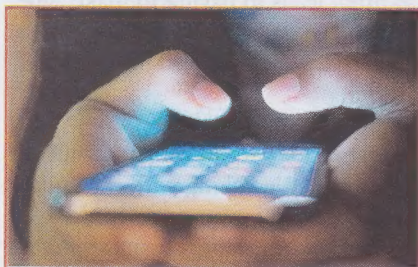
## It's Time!



ERNEST LARSEN

**T**hrough the uproar of the sustained near-uprisings of Covid summer 2020 against police violence and systemic racism, one could sometimes hear more radical voices. The assertion from them that everybody behind bars should be recognized as a political prisoner is no longer completely beyond consideration. If so, then it's worth looking at how radical prisoners have conceptualized their experiences within the state's institutionalization of punishment.

As long ago as 1887, anarchist ex-prisoner Peter Kropotkin wrote, "The first duty of the revolution will be to abolish prisons—those monuments of human hypocrisy." Here, abolition, at least as an obligatory idea rather than a movement, is already solidly in place.



## LETTERS

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some BIPOC people, said they felt that those offering mutual aid to residents experiencing trauma caused by criminal activities were more compassionate than the police would have been.

But, there is definitely a lot more we all need to learn in order to create the kinds of cooperation required to accomplish common goals and really pose a challenge to capitalism and the state.

By 1893, Kropotkin's history of the French Revolution sweeps to this idea's embodiment: "As soon as the bridges of the Bastille had been lowered the crowd rushed into the courtyards. . . to search the fortress and free the prisoners entombed in the *oubliettes*. There was great emotion, and tears were shed at the sight of the phantoms who issued from their cells, bewildered by the light of the sun and by the sound of the many voices that welcomed them. . . The whole town was soon delirious with joy on hearing that the Bastille was in the hands of the people."

From this salutary delirium, you can pluck one word: "phantoms," emanations of living death. Just about every political prisoner (anarchist or not)—from 19<sup>th</sup> century illegalist Clement Duval, to Alexander Berkman, straight through Barbara Deming's 1966 *Prison Notes*, to Tasos Theofilou's 2019 *Writings from a Greek Prison*, characterizes the experience of imprisonment as living death.

Last summer, a harrowing slippage

and crossover became unavoidable. The living death of mass incarceration simply became death—neither chosen. During the ongoing Covid onslaught, the authorities, state and federal, stumbled toward releasing from our unspeakably vast carceral system a significant number of inmates convicted of nonviolent crimes.

New York opened the gates to 3000 prisoners, for instance. The Marshall Project calculates an eight percent drop in the prison population—from 2.3 to roughly 2.2 million, in the first six months of 2020.

However, this deceptive decline largely resulted not from opening the doors, but from shutting down much of the justice system. Fewer arrests, closed courts, few grand juries, and still fewer convictions.

Submitting only to the unbreakable Law of Unanticipated Consequences, Covid acted as an unexpected friend to many who would otherwise find themselves swept into the clutches of what still passes for justice. A swiftly expanding disaster temporarily relieved the slow unending catastrophe of state punishment, attesting to its obscene bloat.

Political prisoners tirelessly point out that it is the social order itself that's criminal. Thus, in her 1971 "Letter from the Marin County Jail," Black activist and academic Angela Davis wrote: "... the police would be unable to set into motion their racist machinery were they not sanctioned and supported by the judicial system. The courts not only consistently abstain from prosecuting criminal behavior on the part of the police, but they convict, on the basis of biased police testimony, countless Black men and women."

One turning-point came last summer with the remarkable insurgence of the abolitionist movement. Sparked by George Floyd's murder caught on video, an event experienced as yet another outbreak of a civil war declared over in 1865. It evokes the following chilling comparison.

In Wisconsin in 1854, Joshua



Glover, a runaway—self-freed—slave was re-captured and dumped, mangled and bleeding, into a wagon, and, with a marshal's foot on his neck, taken to a Milwaukee county jail.

Two days later, a fired-up abolitionist crowd forcibly re-freed Glover and spirited him off to Canada via the Underground Railroad. The sustained, compressed violence of these two historical incidents, white lawman's foot against black man's neck and white lawman's knee against black man's neck, remains shocking, but not surprising. One difference. In 1854, the direct action of the abolitionist movement succeeded, a revolt still beyond the reach of today's abolitionists.

In 1892, five years into his inflated sentence for shooting industrialist Henry Frick during a strike, Alexander Berkman, among the most disciplined of anarchist revolutionaries, felt, "I am buried alive in this stone grave."

In his 1970 introduction to Berkman's *Prison Memoirs of an Anarchist*, Paul Goodman points out that "men like Kropotkin, Berkman, and Debs were quite certain, both by their philosophy and the evidence of their senses, that the concept of punishment is worthless and the jails must simply be abolished. The Bastille is the essence of what is rotten and must be stormed first."

Echoing Berkman, 120 years on, Tasos Theofilou calls the prison cell "a grave for the living." While Greece itself has been treated like a debtor's prison by the wardens of the European Union, Theofilou, convicted of complicity in homicide and bank robbery, active in the Network of Imprisoned Fighters, was eventually completely exonerated.

His unusual book consists of an open letter, a statement on the appeal, a reflective prolegomena, some fragmentary stories from prisoners' points of view, including one on prison uprisings. It's interwoven with commentary, a free-verse poem, a prison-slang dictionary, and 22 lo-res photos of prisoner-fashioned tools.

This somewhat Brechtian dossier structure subverts the redemption narrative common to prison literature: textual shifts permit only intermittent, contradictory identification with its emotional logic. Stories are compressed into wrenching anecdotes that encapsulate the state's processes of dehumanization.

Yes, Theofilou, says, "you're always naked in the cesspool." He sees the daily brutality and withering repetitiveness of confinement as conditions of ceaseless "condensation." The book is subtitled *32 Steps, or Correspondence from the House of the Dead*. "32 steps in the yard. . . . How much pain can be squeezed into 32 steps, how much injustice, how much poverty, . . . how many family tragedies, how much suppression, how much life in condensed form?"

The "House of the Dead," evokes Dostoyevsky's fictionalized account of his own four-year imprisonment. Theofilou's deadpan prison dictionary, a microcosmic study of a can-

nibalistic social order, defines speech that at once reinforce prisoners' toxic hetero-masculinity and assist resistance to their situational "fuckover."

Anarchism has necessarily been marked by the deployment of tactics and/or strategies shuttling between legalism and illegality. The social/anti-social space of prison as reality, microcosm, and text has long been a testing-ground for such resistance. Theofilou, Kropotkin, Bakunin, and Berkman have all affirmed what they learned from this abysmal negativity.

Theofilou attests, "Even though I did not commit the offenses for which I am accused, I am not innocent. I committed the one offense that includes all others. I am an anarchist. In the class war, I chose the side of the excluded and the underprivileged, the prosecuted and the accursed, the poor, the weak, and the oppressed."

Finally, Emma Goldman noted the hesitant emergence of Law from the punishment-centric Church, then added: "Society might with greater immunity abolish all prisons at once than to hope for protection from these. . . chambers of horrors."

Here, Goldman must reach out to Madame Tussaud, originator of the famous waxworks, Chamber of Horrors, in 1802. Tussaud kickstarted her career casting guillotined French revolutionaries' death masks in the shadow of the re-established Bastille.

Ernest Larsen's *The Trial Before the Trial* (Autonomedia) is the only existing first-person account of the secret grand jury system. In 2014, Larsen was forcibly removed and charged with contempt of court for "disruption" while serving on a Manhattan grand jury. He lives in New York City.



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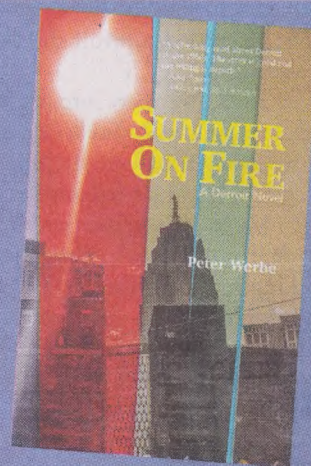
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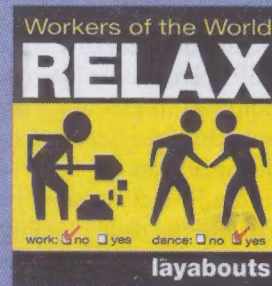


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